

Germans must feel. I can only hope, in the brief space at my disposal, to give an abstract of his beautiful address. He attributes much of their mental attitude, as regards Art, to their intense feeling of personal independence. Their love of magnificence and adornment of the person has, it may be observed, never wholly left the Germans. It gave, in the middle ages, a most precious impulse to what they call the lesser Arts, *die Kleinkünster*, and may still be noted in the taste for pageantry and processions which survive amongst them to the present day. We must try to show, in a subsequent paper, how Sir Frederick works out the curious problems of German Art. It may be observed, however, that it is only to these lesser Arts that he gives unstinted praise, and he fully recognizes the great wealth of the goldsmiths' work which has been preserved to us from the Carolingian age, at which period there were great schools of the goldsmiths' craft, both at Cologne and Aachen. A love of work in the precious metals continued to burn through the middle ages, and the Renaissance yielded some of its most beautiful fruit at the hands of the goldsmith and jewellers, for whom Dürer, the Behams, and Holbein, amongst others, furnished designs that have not since been surpassed.

FLORENCE M. ROBERTS-AUSTEN.

A Book of the Week.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ANNIE BESANT.*

FROM time to time there are born into the world, men and women, who seem destined from their birth to cause disturbance, not only in themselves, but in all those with whom they come in contact. These peculiar natures may be compared to yeast, which, thrown into the vat of life, causes fermentation; which is sometimes for good, as it clears and makes sound the muddy mixture into which it is cast; and is sometimes for bad, making the mixture sourer and cloudier, if possible, than it was before.

Mrs. Besant was one of these "yeasty" natures; her writings, lectures, and opinions have, perhaps, aroused more controversy than any other teachings of modern times. Her autobiography will, in consequence, be largely read, and must inevitably arouse the bitterest disagreement between the advocate of both sides of the religious and political questions of which she writes.

But whatever people's private opinions may be as to the ultimate result, for good or for evil, of her many and diverse teachings, they can, at least, agree in this—that Mrs. Besant's nature was a singularly truthful one, and that from first to last she was willing, nay, eager, to sacrifice all personal comfort and happiness in this life, rather than abandon any belief that to her appeared to be Truth. And it is just this transparent truthfulness of character, which makes her account of herself such interesting and, for some, such profitable reading.

Mrs. Besant's father came of a stock of sturdy Devonshire yeoman, who farmed their own land in honest independent fashion; her mother was of purest Irish descent. Her father died when she was quite a

child, and her mother struggled bravely with poverty, and took a boarding-house at Harrow. Little Annie was educated, from the age of eight, under the care of a Miss Maryat, who seems to have had a strong Evangelical bent, and she took the little imaginative girl to the prayer meetings, dear to all Evangelicals, and in which all took part. Mrs. Besant writes:—

"I used to suffer agonies while I waited for the dreaded words, 'Now, Annie dear, will you speak to Our Lord?' But when my trembling lips had forced themselves into speech, all the nervousness used to vanish, and I was swept away by an enthusiasm that readily clothed itself in balanced sentences, and, alack! at the end I too often hoped that God and Auntie had noticed that I prayed very nicely—a vanity, certainly, not intended to be fostered by the pious exercise."

In 1867, Miss Wood married the Rev. G. Frank Besant, and, after her marriage, the "yeast" in her nature appears to have made her husband exceedingly uncomfortable and angry. They were evidently uncongenial from the first, and, on both sides, the aims and ambitions of the one were as foolishness to the other. How often want of sympathy in ideals—when one of the partners is ardent—destroys and shipwrecks marriages! With a clergyman for her husband, separation was the inevitable result, and one cannot refrain from sympathy with the husband mated to a wife so entirely unsuited to his walk in life.

Then followed a stormy period of doubt which landed Mrs. Besant temporarily upon the lonely desert island of Atheism; and here she had for companion Mr. Bradlaugh. He was a kind and faithful friend, and seems to have given her much wise advice. Some of his phrases are well worth quoting. He says:—

"You should never say you have an opinion on a subject, until you have tried to study the strongest things said against the view to which you are inclined." "You must not think you know a subject, until you are acquainted with all that the best minds have said about it." "Be your own harshest judge . . . read abuse of yourself, and see what grains of truth are in it." "Do not waste time by reading opinions that are mere echoes of your own; read opinions you disagree with, and you will catch aspects of truth you do not readily see."

Mr. Bradlaugh was himself by nature an element of fermentation. He and Mrs. Besant, united in their common interest in the welfare of poor humanity, together lighted a beacon of blue fire, and endeavoured to spread their Propaganda throughout the land.

The story of their warfare over the Knowlton Pamphlet is now historic, and Mrs. Besant tells of their experiences and persecutions in a most spirited way.

Their militant atheism was greatly deplored by most people; but while fully recognising the fact that they made belief in God and immortality difficult to many, and impossible to some, let us also bravely proclaim that women owe them a debt of deep gratitude for the confidence and courage with which they preached their great lesson of "our duty to the unborn," and their sincere conviction of the sinfulness of bringing children into the world whom they could not expect to inherit constitution, morals, nor the bare means of support in life.

This Autobiography first appeared in the pages of the *Weekly Sun*, and we can well remember the anxiety that everyone seemed to experience, to hear each week "what Mrs. Besant was believing now—"

* "Annie Besant, an Autobiography." With twelve illustrations. Fisher Unwin, 1893. 16/-

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