

The Science of the Humanities.

A Dictionary of European Literature: Designed as a Companion to English Studies. By Laurie Magnus. Pp. xii+594. (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd.; New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1926.) 25s. net.

"**B**EAUTY is Truth, Truth Beauty," wrote Keats, in passionate protest against all attempts to divorce them or to see in one the antipathy of the other. A similar recognition is growing that the oft-assumed antithesis between literature and science is a wanton and needless invention. The humanities of science has yet to be written, perhaps, though odd chapters have appeared from time to time; but the science of the humanities, if by such a phrase we may indicate the scientific treatment, in the widest sense of the word 'science,' of the material of the humanities, has for some time had its expositors.

The volume before us is a notable example of this larger view. It is, we believe, the first attempt yet made to apply, on such a restricted scale as the single volume, the comparative method to the literature of Europe. Prof. Saintsbury in his "Periods of European Literature" divided the subject into twelve "Periods" and marshalled a dozen specialists for the work, each of whom wrote a history of his chosen and allotted period. But if English studies are to be made as valuable a discipline as the Greek and Latin which they are displacing in the upper forms of the public schools and in the universities, there is need of a reference book covering the whole field in a single volume. Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible" and Lempriere's "Classical Dictionary" were written on these lines; and Mr. Laurie Magnus's "Dictionary of European Literature" takes a like direction and aim. It is, moreover, an application of scientific method to vast and scattered material.

Such a task is, of course, stupendous in no hackneyed sense of that word. The mere labour of reading, collecting, and collating the mass of material demands great industry and patience; but the crux of the difficulty comes when the digested and assimilated mass has to be turned into the flesh and blood of a live book. This is the ultimate test by which the work is to be judged. Have we here only another catalogue, exact and compendious, if you like, but still only a good catalogue of facts? Or are there spaciousness of view and single-mindedness of aim that give a unity to the whole? So far as we have been able to judge, the book stands this severe test.

The bulk of the articles consists of well-documented and up-to-date biographico-critical accounts of authors in all countries, with résumés of the literary history of

each country under its own name. The author throughout combines an unflagging spirit with a calm and, so far as we have seen, an unbiassed critical judgment, and he is very often singularly happy in his mental picture of the writer whom he is treating. It would be pointless on the part of a reviewer to complain that too little space is given where he would have liked, or expected, more; and too much where his own taste and judgment would have led him to give less. Such personal disappointments are inevitable in all dictionaries and anthologies. It is perhaps only less pointless to say that, rarely here and there, we could have spared a little of the space devoted to the personal side of the particular author being treated, so as to have a fuller exposition of his work and message. This is, however, but by the way.

A valuable feature of the book is supplementary to these biographical and critical accounts of authors. In ordinary histories of English literature, or studies of single authors, names occur which are imperfectly understood. Thus, Renaissance, Reformation, Humanism, Romance, and similar terms cross several centuries and all countries. They are English names for European phenomena, and the English student is commonly very inadequately seized of their European meaning and value, and of the relation borne by the English part to the European whole. Within the circumscribed limits set by a single volume, Mr. Laurie Magnus has given a vivid and considerable elucidation of these generic phenomena. The reader may well turn immediately, for example, to the article on "Nature, Natural, Naturalism."

Another important set of topics is that of the classical writers. Tennyson is called Virgilian, and so on, and the metaphor is accepted easily, but the European vogue of Virgil, Cicero, Plato, and the rest cannot be grasped by students unless they consult special textbooks, usually in a foreign tongue. The "Dictionary of European Literature" endeavours to supply this information under the name of each classical writer. In such questions, too, as the influence of "Climate," the changing treatment of "Woman," the literary motive of "Death," there are similar articles bringing together information from various places and times, and fusing the constituent parts into a combined and intelligible whole.

The admirable preface to the book should be read to gather its purpose and aim. Its sub-title tells us the book is "designed as a companion to English studies." In our judgment it is, taking it all in all, a pleasant yet learned, stimulating yet judicious, companion, of fine but tempered enthusiasms. Its best virtue, perhaps, is that, as guide, it gives us zest to roam free and know more.