

SHORTER NOTICES.

Correspondance d'Hermite et de Stieltjes, publiée par les soins de B. BAILLAUD, H. BOURGET. Avec une Préface de ÉMILE PICARD. Vol. I, xx + 477 pp.; vol. II, vi + 464 pp. 8vo. Paris, Gauthier-Villars, 1905.

It is all too seldom that the mathematical public gets even a furtive view of the private life of its masters, or is allowed to penetrate into their ateliers and observe how their illustrious works are elaborated. In other fields of science, in literature and art, we are more fortunate. How great would be our loss if we knew nothing of a Darwin, a Goethe, or a Michel Angelo except their finished works. It is true that mathematicians are not altogether destitute of information regarding the inner life of their leaders. Who can read the biographies of Hamilton, Abel, or Jacobi, or the letters of Gauss to Schumacher and Bessel without being touched and edified?

The present collection of letters which passed between Hermite and Stieltjes between the years 1882 to 1894 forms a very precious accession to the mathematician's scanty library of personalia, and will be welcomed by all those who love to associate with the works of a great man the man himself.

A sketch of Hermite's life has already been given in the BULLETIN,* we will therefore devote here only a few lines to the all too brief career of Stieltjes. The son of a distinguished civil engineer, Thomas-Jean Stieltjes was born at Zwolle, Holland, December 29, 1856. He studied at the Ecole Polytechnique of Delft, where his great talents were recognized both by teachers and classmates. In spite of his exceptional abilities he did not graduate, being prevented by an instinctive dislike for competition, which seems to have pursued him all his life. In 1877 he entered as computer the Observatory of Leyden and later took part in the work of observation. But soon celestial mechanics and the higher mathematics began to absorb his attention, and interfere to such an extent with his routine duties, that he entertained the very bizarre idea of giving up his position (although living then in straitened circumstances), and coming to America to study under Sylvester, who was lecturing at the Johns Hopkins University.

* Vol. 13 (1906-7), pp. 182-190.