

CONCERNING REVIEWS.

ON reading certain book reviews that have appeared in recent numbers of the BULLETIN, one is reminded of Addison's complaint that rather than to dwell upon the excellencies of a work some reviewers imagine they have discharged their duty when they have succeeded in pointing out slight faults and errors, forgetting that

"Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow;
He who would search for pearls must dive below."

As an instance justifying this complaint I wish to cite the review of the "Memorabilia Mathematica" in the January number of the BULLETIN. Except for an extract from the preface of the book and its table of contents, which is erroneously quoted (there are twenty-one chapter headings instead of the seventeen quoted by the reviewer, and two of those are wrongly quoted), one seeks in vain for a word that would enlighten the reader as to the contents of the book. The remainder of the review, as far as it deals with the work under consideration, is limited to trivial errors and petty fault-finding. Of what possible interest can it be to the reader to be told that in one place *T* should be replaced by *T'*, or that "inapt" appears where the original has the misspelled form "unapt," or again, that Newton's utterance "I don't know what I may seem to the world" as quoted by Parton is given by Brewster in the form "I do not know what I may appear to the world"? Surely an author might deem himself fortunate whose work were blemished by no greater faults!

Suppose the reviewer's five-page review were reviewed according to his own standard. He writes "Porton" for "Parton," "Eucljde" for the "Euclide" of the original, and "hut" for "hyt" in the line "Yn Egypte he tawghte hyt ful wyde." His quotation from Prior

"Circles to square, and cubes to double,
Would give a man excessive trouble;"

should read

"Circles to square, and Cubes to double,
Would give a Man excessive Trouble:"*

* Matthew Prior, Cambridge English Classics, Cambridge (1905), p. 248.

The original form of the line

“God said, ‘Let Newton be!’ and all was light,”

from Pope’s Epitaph intended for Sir Isaac Newton is not

“God said, *Let Newton be!* and all was light,”

as the reviewer has it, but

“GOD said, *Let Newton be!* and all was Light.”*

There are other errors of a like character but enough have been cited to lend support to Addison’s dictum that there never was a critic who made it his business to lash the faults of others who was not guilty of greater faults himself.

In conclusion I must call attention to one or two more serious errors in the review in question. On page 188 we are told that in Ahrens’s *Scherz und Ernst in der Mathematik* names of living mathematicians are rarely met with. The volume in question contains by actual count 20 quotations from Klein, 18 from Poincaré, 10 from M. Cantor, 7 each from Hilbert and Frobenius, 6 from G. Cantor, and so on through more than a score of names of men either now living or deceased since the book appeared in 1904. Again, the *Memorabilia Mathematica* contains 1,140 quotations instead of some 1,200 as stated by the reviewer. The seven-line reference on page 190 to the reviewer’s own paper is irrelevant to the matter in hand. A most curious slip occurs on page 191 in the reviewer’s observation “for Reid, M.” read “Reid, T.” the line criticized being, “Reid, M. as an exercise in language.”

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WITH regard to the collection of quotations which Professor Moritz edits, the reviewer does not find that he has made a single statement which may be legitimately termed inaccurate, or which is liable to give a wrong impression as to the merits of the editor’s redaction—a redaction which the editor himself appears to regard as containing “pearls” unnoticed by the reviewer. Let us see what his strictures amount to.

* Warburton’s “The Works of Alexander Pope, as they were delivered to the Editor a little while before his death, etc.” London (1760), vol. 6, p. 99.

In spite of the authority of the great Oxford Dictionary he contends that "some 1200" may not be used to refer to 1140! Again, the reviewer is accused of error in tabulation of the contents. These consist, presumably, (1) in stating that the quotations were classed under 20 headings when the editor claims 21 ("Persons and anecdotes, A-M," "Persons and anecdotes, N-Z," the reviewer was guilty of combining under one heading: "Persons and anecdotes"); (2) in asserting that "Definition and object of mathematics" was a heading when the first word should have been in the plural form; and (3) in leaving it to the reader to infer that two of the 20 headings, "Mathematics as a Fine Art" and "Mathematics as a Language," were indicated by "Mathematics as a fine art, as a language"; and similarly that three headings were indicated by "Mathematics and logic, and philosophy, and science."

In response to the inquiries of Professor Moritz the following replies may be vouchsafed: (a) In the Thomson and Tait quotation *T* has no meaning, while the calculus notation *T'* is peculiarly pregnant with suggestion; (b) it is not true that unapt is misspelled for inapt in Orr's mnemonic—this may be verified by the simple expedient of consulting the Century Dictionary; (c) it may be learned from any first-class librarian that Parton is a worthless authority in connection with any statement concerning Newton.

Let us now take up five examples, somewhat different in character, to illustrate Professor Moritz's methods of criticism.

1. In his book he gives two of the seven lines written by Pope as an epitaph on Sir Isaac Newton and refers to those two lines as the epitaph in question; the reviewer remarked that this statement was inaccurate and gave the full quotation, with a reference to Elwin and Courthope's standard edition of Pope's works. In this quotation there is not the slightest misprint in capitalization, in italics, or in punctuation. That some other edition, no more authoritative, has a different capitalization in one line is entirely irrelevant.

2. The same method is applied to the quotation by Prior, again given with exact reference by the reviewer. There is not a particle of variation between the original and that indicated in the review.

3. Again, the reviewer wrote: "on page 405 of the index for Reid, M. read Reid, T." To be more explicit, 8 quotations are attributed to Thomas Reid in the Memorabilia. These

are all incorrectly listed in the index on page 405, under Reid, M. Instead, therefore, of a "most curious slip" on the part of the reviewer, yet another has been made by Professor Moritz himself. But his slips in this sentence are not confined to one, or even two. Without any foundation whatever the reviewer is accused of criticizing a line "Reid, M. as an exercise in language." This line occurs nowhere in the book. True one does find "Reidt, M. as an exercise in language," to which the reviewer made no reference, but here he now finds another slip, for instead of M. should be F.*

4. The reviewer repudiates Professor Moritz's statement of what he wrote concerning Ahrens's work. What he *did* write was as follows: "A 24-page detailed index of subjects and authors provides the means for rapid orientation. Names of living mathematicians are rarely met with, but references to the "old masters" such as Abel, Euclid, Gauss, Helmholtz, Lagrange, Laplace, Steiner and Weierstrass are very numerous." Even if "a score of names" of living mathematicians *may* be found in the 24-page index, the statement of the reviewer has not been shown to be in the smallest degree inaccurate.

5. With exact reference to Halliwell's *Rara Mathematica* the reviewer quoted some lines referring to Euclid. It is not true that "Euclide" should replace "Eucllyde" in that quotation; it is true that "hyt" should replace "hut" in the third line, and the reviewer is glad to have his attention drawn to this slip in proof-reading.

The relation between the reviewer's and critic's statements thus set forth, render impotent the critic's remark concerning "other errors of a like character." In conclusion it may now be added that in his review the reviewer mentioned only a few of the three score of slips which he had noticed in the *Memorabilia*.

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* On page 408 the biographer of Lord Kelvin is referred to as Sylvanus (instead of Silvanus) Thompson. The reviewer is indebted to Mr. W. J. Greenstreet for calling his attention to this same slip in his review.