

"was formerly pronounced at the commencement of words like knit, knap, and knot." A grammar of the dialect is contributed by S. Dickson Brown, a member of the Philological Society. This connection should have saved him, at page 10, from going counter to the Society's new English (Oxford) Dictionary, when explaining the idiom "I had rather." He is still in the bog of "I would [I'd] rather."

The twelfth part of the "Anecdota Oxoniensia, Mediæval and Modern Series," contains an edition and translation by Professor Kuno Meyer of the "Cáin Adamnán," an early Irish treatise on the law of Adamnán. The document is of much interest, both to the Celtic grammarian and to the student of early Irish institutions. It belongs to that class of texts, now known to be numerous, which, though reserved in mediæval or even in modern manuscripts, are proved by their language to have been written in the Old Irish period. In this instance the two existing manuscripts date from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, respectively, and are ultimately derived from a lost Book of Raphoe of uncertain age. The composition of the treatise itself, however, is probably to be assigned to the ninth century. The linguistic difficulties, which are usually considerable in the texts thus preserved, have been adequately dealt with by the experienced editor in his notes and glossary. Dr. Meyer has also done a good deal for the historical elucidation of the material, though he has been compelled by illness to abandon for the present his purpose of writing a systematic introduction on this phase of the subject. It is earnestly to be hoped that he may soon be able to resume the task. The treatise as it stands is clearly a mixture of historical and legendary elements, and an analysis of the underlying documents would make an interesting contribution to an important period of Irish ecclesiastical history. It will be remembered that the Law of Adamnán (best known, perhaps, as the "Lex Innocentium") was promulgated during the time of controversy about Roman and Celtic usages in the Irish Church.

#### HALDANE'S DESCARTES.

Descartes: His Life and Times. By Elizabeth S. Haldane. E. P. Dutton & Co. 8vo, pp. xxviii, 398.

The facts which render Descartes interesting to us of to-day, may be summarized under three heads. First, modern philosophers are substantially unanimous in reckoning him as the founder of modern philosophy. Secondly, some of those who are most competent to judge of such a matter, tell us that his vast influence in philosophy is closely connected with the fact that, in an age of great mathematicians, he was either the second or nearly of that rank. That is, he cannot be compared with Fermat, but his power was not far from that of Desargues. He was particularly helpful in mathematics, for it was he who gave analytical geometry to the public, went far toward settling the signs of algebra, and gave a useful rule about algebraic equations.

The third class of facts which stimulate

our curiosity concerning Descartes consists of sundry characteristics of the man which seem almost inexplicably at odds with the first two. It is staggering to common sense to find metaphysicians ranking Descartes so very high, and yet denying almost everything that he pronounced to be mathematically evident. What he plumes himself upon most and almost exclusively is his institution, for inquiry into any subject, of a method which, as he maintains, perforce must absolutely exclude all danger of falling into error; and yet almost every scientific proposition to the truth of which this method led him, and which, because it so resulted, he insists is as certain as that twice two is four, is now seen to be wildly false. Such is his notion that "the brutes" have no feeling, and may be vivisectioned as unconcerned as one would saw through a log; that a vacuum is unthinkable, and that consequently our universe must be unlimited; that the movements of the planets are determined by vortices or whirls in the ether; that light is a material substance, resistance to the translation of which determines the law of refraction; that colliding bodies must behave in a way in which the fact is that no bodies really do. One is further surprised to find that so great a man seemed unable to see any merit in the work of Galileo, and was so disgusted with his denials of Scripture truth that he took no interest in his work; that he could see no mark of genius in the discovery by the boy Blaise Pascal of that hexagram from which all the properties common to conic sections can be deduced; and that he even affected to look down upon the works of Fermat, of Vieta, and of Desargues.

The most surprising thing of all, however, in a mind of such unquestionable power and greatness, is that Descartes seems to have been continually engaged, and that very successfully, in deceiving himself. Thus, he plainly regarded himself as the only philosopher worthy of that name that ever lived; and yet it seems impossible that, after eight years in perhaps the most admirable Jesuit college there ever was, he should not have been perfectly aware that his famous *Je pense, donc je suis* was taken entire out of St. Augustine's "De Civitate Dei," or "De Anima," or "De Quantitate Animæ," for its substance, as the form of the "Discours de la Méthode" and of the "Méditations" is imitated from the "Confessiones"; nor that he should be so totally unconscious of how far he was himself the result of Galileo, of Fermat, of Vieta, and others whom he had read; nor that at two different times he persuaded himself that he had made an absolutely clean sweep from his own mind of every vestige of belief in everything; for we cannot think that the inconsistent narratives in the "Discours" and in the "Méditations" refer to the same occasion. And yet each time his definite purpose—as he would have hotly maintained it to be, had it been questioned, and as he distinctly states in the dedication of the "Méditations"—was to put certain predesignate propositions of theology beyond question. As long as this universal and absolute doubt lasted (for he apparently had no doubt at all that in a month or two, at the most, it would be over), he decided that it would certainly be best for him to continue in all respects to con-

duct himself as if he retained his old belief; as if it were possible for a man for days to keep up, without fail, a line of conduct about all things without the slightest belief in the advantage of such conduct—always, for example, using the tongs to stir his fire, instead of his fingers, though he had utterly dismissed all belief that fire would burn his fingers. One of the provisional rules that he adopted for his guidance during his period of doubt was that he should firmly and resolutely adhere in his conduct to the effect of each and every item of his former beliefs, no matter how utterly improbable it might be shown to be, so long as it was not mathematically demonstrated to be false! Verily, had he included among his doubts a very strong doubt whether he really was doubting the while, his state of mind would have been less childish. The last part of his life was devoted to the study of physiology and medicine, entirely without books, as was his wont, with no view to any publication, but simply to prolong his own life. Yet he died of pneumonia at fifty-four, probably in consequence of his obstinate opposition to the physician whom he had called in.

Such are the facts that excite our curiosity about Descartes. We want to know, first of all, better than anybody has yet told us, what the particular character of his mathematical genius was; and then, what relation there was between his mathematical thought and his philosophy. We want to know what all our hand-books of the history of philosophy, except Hoeftding's, leave very mysterious (and even that does not sufficiently explain), wherein and whereby he is the founder of all modern philosophy. We want as detailed a picture as possible of the wilful and irrational element of the man, or of whatever else it may have been that seems such, together with all that seems wise and practical; and after the facts have been given, we want to see them treated by scientific psychology, so that we may gain a comprehension of the make-up of this extraordinary intellect. We want to know with the utmost minuteness about the education of the boy and of the man.

On the other hand, there are facts which restrict our curiosity, or give it special directions. Descartes took not the slightest interest either in scientific politics or in the political and ecclesiastical movements of his times, excepting so far as they might have a bearing upon his own security, peace, and dignity, and, further, excepting a lively interest in some sieges and perhaps other military operations. Consequently, Miss Haldane's chapters on the general history of his "times," however interesting in themselves (and really they tell us nothing that we have not often read before), connect themselves only in their most general outlines with Descartes. He was a bachelor, and a thorough one. After he had devoted himself to philosophy he lived in more than seclusion, changing his domicile every few months from one Dutch town or village to another, and giving as his address some place sufficiently distant from where he really lived, whence letters could be forwarded to him. He used to lie abed till noon, doing his thinking. The rest of the day he spent in writing and in amusing himself in his solitary fashion, often doubtless at the

gaming-table. He took care always to have one good correspondent in Paris, for scientific and other correspondence, another at Leyden for business, and so on. The only ones in whom we are quite assured that he took a real personal interest were two royal ladies. This known, we do not particularly care in what precise order of succession he made his different abodes.

The narrative of the events of his life was told in two volumes with all-sufficient accuracy by the industrious Adrien Baillet in 1691, from information assiduously collected by an Abbé Legrand (or perhaps only later an abbé; but he must not be confounded with Père Antoine Le Grand, called the "abbreviator of Descartes" on account of his still useful *Institutio Philosophiæ*). Baillet was not an elegant writer, but he knew, by great experience, how to write an accurate and useful book; he had all the information about Descartes that anybody can have now (barring a few minutiae), and much besides. The volume of Blackwood's admirable "Philosophical Classics" that is devoted to Descartes is from the pen of Professor Mahaffy. We need not say that it is a very useful book, nor that it leaves much to be desired, were it only owing to its smallness. The latter must still more apply to Edward Caird's article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. It becomes clear enough, then, what was wanted in the way of an English volume on Descartes. We should have preferred something like a reproduction (abridged, if necessary) of Baillet, with annotations, and with three long appendices, one of which should explain Descartes as a mathematician, another what he did for philosophy, and a third the man himself. Of these four desiderata, Miss Haldane sufficiently supplies the first, although she omits some facts with the apparent purpose of avoiding what would be unfavorable to Descartes, such as the details of his behavior in his last illness. She evidently knows nothing of mathematics or its history—even referring to Desargues, who carried projective geometry to wonderful heights, as one "whose work in life was to make inventions which might prove of practical value to artisans and mechanical workers," and whom "we may judge to have been a popular writer and adapter rather than purely a man of science." Had she taken the trouble to refer to Moritz Cantor's work or any other modern history of mathematics, that bit of silly stuff would have been spared. Of philosophical comment there is more than enough; but it is not of the right kind, being neither critical nor elucidative of the historical position of Descartes, and simply consists in telling her readers, as if they were three-year-old tots, what they "of course" believe. Moreover, it is written from the standpoint of the vaguest and weakest variety of Hegelianism. However, the reader can skip all those parts, and probably will. The reviewer had not this happy privilege.

The nature and character of the man are insufficiently considered. We should like to have been told more of the studies at the Jesuit College of La Flèche, or, in default of that information, of the best Jesuit instruction of the time. In particular, we should like to know how much Descartes would be likely to hear there about St.

Augustine and the 'De Civitate Dei.' The 'Correspondance' of Descartes, as now so ably edited in the new edition of his works by Adam and Tannery, would supply material for the exercise of a great power of psychological analysis. Instead of anything of that sort, we find only insipid, vacillating, inconsistent reflections, such as the most superficial reader would make for himself. The style of the book is easy and unperiodical; a little too much so, perhaps. Superfluous words are not avoided. We venture to guess that the phrase "later on," for an adverbial *later*, may occur, on the average, once in five pages, in the chapters where there is any occasion for it. At any rate, one tires of it. The index is sufficient. We might have picked the author up about many points; but we have endeavored to avoid fault-finding that would not touch the essential merits or demerits of the work.

#### IBSEN'S LETTERS.

*Letters of Henrik Ibsen.* Translated by John Nilsen Laurvik and Mary Morison. New York: Fox, Duffield & Co. 1905.

There are men who put so much of themselves into their letters that these remain their best biography. They are usually little affected by their surroundings, and ask only to be let alone that they may develop what is in them. Such a one was Ibsen. He realized from the first that in Norway he had small chance of being left to himself, and so he avoided his native land. Once well out of it, his career was unaffected by his setting, and he could have written just as well in London as in Rome or Dresden or Munich. He hated correspondence, but, like many persons who profess this distaste, he wrote a great many letters, and, as they appear in the present collection, they are a perfectly sufficient account of his life.

He was born at Skien in 1828, of a family once prosperous, but then reduced to poverty. The break with his parents dates almost from his fourteenth year, when he went to Grimstad to become an apothecary's apprentice, and shocked the respectable citizens by his comic verses and caricatures. From the first he hated every symptom of orthodoxy or social prejudice. His people were both conventional and orthodox, and at the age of twenty, when he went to Christiania, Ibsen severed his connection with them, convinced, as he told Brandes in more than one letter, that the only important thing is to save one's self, to develop one's talent, and to escape from those who could only condemn or misunderstand. It was more than forty years before he revisited Skien; his parents, who died in the seventies, he never saw again. Except for a few months of study in Christiania in 1850-51, there is no trace of any formal education. In the latter year Ibsen went to Bergen as stage-manager of a theatre. There he met and married Susanna Thoresen, whom nearly twenty years later he describes as having "exactly the character desiderated by a man of mind—she is illogical, but has a strong poetic instinct, a broad, liberal mind, and an almost violent antipathy to all petty considerations."

From 1857-64 Ibsen was again in Christiania as "artistic director" of the Nor-

wegian Theatre, a position which barely provided him with the means to support himself and his wife and child. Those years of hardship were soon over. Norway may not provide an atmosphere favorable to the unconventional genius, but she makes it easy for him to live elsewhere. The first Government grant was awarded to Ibsen in 1862—the sum of £27 for the expenses of a summer tour to collect the songs and legends of Norway—and about the same amount in the following year for the same purpose. The book that was to have been the fruit of these journeys never appeared. In 1863 he was given a travelling-grant of £90. His debts, which amounted to about £112, were paid by his friends in Christiania, and he left Norway, which in the next twenty-seven years he was to revisit only twice, and then with reluctance and misgivings. What made this long exile possible was a life pension of £90 granted by the Norwegian Storting in 1866. But until his writings began to pay, as they soon did under the auspices of his Danish publisher, it was the generosity of his Norwegian friends that supplemented the Government grants and enabled him to live in comfort in Rome. In spite, therefore, of Ibsen's dislike and disdain of Norwegian narrowness and parochialism, constantly expressed in these letters, Norway has no reason to be ashamed of her treatment of her iconoclastic son. In 1872 he writes of the "mean behavior" of the Government in refusing to increase this annuity. Ibsen never visited England, where, in the early seventies, the most sympathetic of all his critics, Mr. Gosse, had introduced his plays to the readers of the *Spectator*, in which appeared, in 1872, the first English article on Ibsen. Of the Scandinavian countries he always looked to Denmark as the place "where one is least trammelled by existing prejudices," and it was a Dane, George Brandes, who, almost from the beginning, ranged himself on Ibsen's side and interpreted him to the public. The best letters in this collection are those to Brandes, which have already been published separately in the *Revue de Paris*, in a French translation.

Before he left Norway, Ibsen had published several plays, including "Catilina" (1850), "The Feast at Solhaug" (1856), "Lady Inger of Østraat" (1857), "The Vikings at Helgeland" (1858), "Love's Comedy" (1863). In Rome he at once began his drama on Julian. But what really possessed his thought at this time was the subject of "Brand," which suddenly came into his mind "in strong and clear outlines" one day in 1865 when he strolled into St. Peter's. While he wrote it, he felt "indescribably happy, with the exaltation of a Crusader."

"If I were asked to tell you," he wrote in that year to Björnson, "what has been the chief result of my stay abroad, I should say that it consisted in my having driven out of myself the aestheticism which had a great power over me—an isolated aestheticism with a claim to independent existence. . . . I am now sufficiently serious to be very severe with myself. An aesthete in Copenhagen once said to me: 'Christ is really the most interesting phenomenon in the world's history.' The aesthete enjoyed him as the glutton does the sight of an oyster. I have always been too strong to become a creature of that type; but what the intellectual asses might have made of me if they had had me all to themselves, I know not."

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