REVIEWS AND CRITICISM.

The Autobiography—A Critical and Comparative Study. By Anna Robeson Burr. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909.

In "The Autobiography" Mrs. Burr has made a genuine and valuable contribution to psychological literature. As we are reminded, the objective record has for years furnished material to the historian, while in the subjective record lies unused material of enormous value to the psychologist. The book is a pioneer, the first serious attempt at a comparative study of subjective autobiography, and contains a careful and critical survey of two hundred and sixty-five autobiographies, dating from the earliest Christian times to the beginning of the nineteenth century. These figures, however, can convey only a faint idea of the prodigious amount of work involved, since many times that number of books had to be read before they could be rejected as unfit for the author's purpose. Confining herself exclusively to subjective autobiography—the "culte de soi"—she has admitted none to her pages who fails to pass at her hands the double test of earnestness of purpose and sincerity of execution. This "autobiographical intention" is best defined in Mrs. Burr's opinion by the words of Marie Bashkirtsev,—*"As if no one in the world were to read it, yet with the purpose of being read."*

The book makes an appeal, however, not only to the psychologist, nor solely to the student, for whose help and guidance certain classifications and an index are appended, but also to the lover of books, and especially of personal memoirs. To him comes the delight of old friendships renewed, and thanks to Mrs. Burr's stimulating choice of quotations, the even greater joy of sampling unknown treasures.

Mrs. Burr first traces the history of autobiography from its appearance in the Christian Era. The main classification is in three great groups: historical, religious, and scientific, each headed by its archetype, Julius Caesar, Augustin, and Cardan.

Of these three the last, Jerome Cardan, is the only one likely to be unfamiliar to the average reader. An Italian scientist, living in the sixteenth century, by many deemed a madman, Mrs. Burr presents him to us as the first introspective psychologist, "a Ribot studying an Aristotle," standing "in the same relation to the new psychology as Galileo to astronomy." His was a curious personality, uniting an intense, independent, intellectual development with a marked degree of the superstition common to his age. It is hardly possible to reconcile Cardan's superstition with his intellectual power without a knowledge of his social group. This fact illustrates one of the reasons for Mrs. Burr's sub-grouping of her material, and through this arrangement we get a more comprehensive, and as it were, birds-eye view of the whole autobiographical field. By such a comparative study of contempora-

neous groups, it is possible to throw much light on the social and moral movements of the past. One deduction drawn seems natural, that "the subjective autobiography groups itself about the intellectual movements and changes of the world, and lessens or disappears in times of material change." Also through this grouping it is possible to see more clearly the influence of certain autobiographies on their imitators, for instance the outbreaks of military memoirs following Blaise de Monluc's Commentaries, the effect of Bassompierre on Saint Simon, of Rousseau on George Eliot, or Marmontel on John Stuart Mill. This last has received much obtuse comment, according to Mrs. Burr, not the least of it from the pen of Professor William James.

In discussing nationality and profession in their relation to self-study, Mrs. Burr claims for the Italians that they approach more nearly than any other nation to the ideal autobiography, that rare ability to combine the scientific method with high intellectual capacity, emotion, and literary style. She finds the distinctive note in French autobiography is literary, in German, sentimental, in English, religious, and in American, utilitarian. This last is based on Benjamin Franklin's autobiography. There are many, especially among the worshipers of Abraham Lincoln, who will quarrel with Mrs. Burr's assertion that Franklin is the American ideal, "the most typically American of all our great men." Those who are more than willing to accept him as such, may still fail to see why "Burns has clearer insight," or why "some courageous idealist" would have added more to our national glory. Some men live the poetry and idealism that others write about. No man who was not courageous could have faced as he did the English parliament and none but an idealist could have held before himself and the world the beacon-light of American independence,—only his was an idealism welded to practical common sense.

The contribution of the various autobiographers to the subject of memory but sustains the prevalent theory of its close relation to genius. This chapter on memory, too, is replete with valuable information for the child psychologist on the subject of first memories and the beginning of self-consciousness.

Enough is quoted from the many religious confessions to convert the reader to Mrs. Burr's opinion that a complete and authoritative work on religious autobiography would be an invaluable contribution to the world's literature. The relation of physical causes to religious mania is only one among many suggestive ideas contained in this chapter.

We are not surprised to hear that if there be one subject upon which the autobiographer is likely to write fully, it is the sex-relation, but in spite of this it appears that confessions of genuine passion are rare.

Inexorably opposed to the pathological interpretation of genius, Mrs. Burr believes that "the intellectual life holds the only enduring

and vital happiness which humanity is likely to know"; and in this mass of self-revelation she finds a wealth of testimony to support this opinion. In spite of the richer and more impressive self-revelation of men of genius like Rousseau, the fact remains that one does not need to be a genius in order to be a great autobiographer. The impression that such work must be the outcome of a restless egotism, of a neurotic temperament, or unbalanced mind, is false. It appears that the great body of self-revelation has been presented by persons who differ very little from ourselves except in their ability.

The author lays great stress on the sincerity of the subjective record and on her belief that the "majority of capital autobiographies have been written in the interest of truth and are the outcome of serious intention, the result of a deep-seated psychological impulse." To the sceptic who doubts the validity of the material, claiming that we cannot if we will tell the exact truth about ourselves, Mrs. Burr retorts that to this rule the great are an exception, that in them is the imperious lash of truth driving them to a finer sincerity, a more penetrating candor. She points out that serious and laudable motives for writing are in the ascendant, and her data show that self-study makes its appeal to the exact rather than to the imaginative mind. It is interesting to find that although Mrs. Burr quotes Weiniger to support the claim that the incitement to autobiography comes from special psychological qualifications, she allows thirty-four women to pass her test of autobiographical intention, especially commending her sex for their continuity of memory. This is a substantial piece of evidence against Weiniger's claim that woman is incapable of either sincerity or continuity of memory.

Critics will probably dissent from some of Mrs. Burr's judgments. Some persons will take exception to the short shrift vouchsafed Cardinal Newman; Havelock Ellis is bound to quarrel with the cutting out of Casanova; some student of insanity will object to Mr. Beers being classified as a "freak," considering his motives were humanitarian. Perhaps this is one of the book's charms, the interesting questions it opens up, its stimulating, its suggestive quality. For Mrs. Burr herself says that the object of her book is "mainly suggestive rather than conclusive." Scarcely a chapter which does not either arouse the ardor of the litterateur or open to the student some fruitful line of research. Above all, Mrs. Burr's manner of treatment is alien to the statistician, and rarely encountered in comparative studies or in books of reference. She handles her subject with discrimination and humor, with vivid sympathy and delicate understanding.

NEWS AND COMMENT.

Modern Educational Work at Rochester.

Rochester, New York, is not one of the largest cities in these United States, but it has a public school system which appears to realize in prac-