NEW PUBLICATIONS.

TASTE IN ITALY.

Mons. Henri Taine, the barest, keenest and most scintillant of modern critics, made in (we think) 1865 a journey into Italy, from which country the letters now republished and translated* were sent hot and hot to a Paris journal. M. Taine is the finished, last result of the French system of analysis; in a sense more absolute than has ever been fulfilled until lately—in a sense that would have shown the immensely broad generalizations of poor Lage to be quite unworthy his own boast—he is "nothing if not critical." That brave ensign was well enough in his way, and in his day; he exhibits the intellectual irritability of a spirit naturally keen, but lacking in educated breadth, and even a little warped by an exhaustless hatred of a totally unsympathetic character; but if Henri Taine had stood in Lage's place on that sunny coast of Cyprus, and had undertaken the world-famous philippic on woman, we should have a delineation that would seem the abstract and brief chronicle of the sex; we should have her feminine intuition celebrated, and at the same time made to seem something singularly peculiar; we should have her vanity curtailed and epigrammatized; her weakness adored; and, notably, her virtues placed in the most seductive light, and made to produce the impression of vices. That is the way in which Taine would have managed a philippic. But the philippic hardly belongs to criticism proper; the temper of invective can only be fed by a one-sided attention to a single set of characteristics, the vicious ones. To the accomplished critical faculty vice does not exist; vice is part of the type. Criticism is Brahma; she is the doubter and the doubt, and one to her are shame and fame. The repose of her senses may be disturbed by no passion, no predilection, no generous heartburn for the wrong, no "rich anger like that of Keats' Moneta in the moment when, at his most antipodal distance from the moral critical, he "imprisons her soft hand, and lets her rave." Here is a picture of the critic, by a modern author of excellence, and it happens to have been intended as a picture of M. Taine. "He decides nothing; he looks and he analyzes; his sole object; he carries himself over to the author, whom he is reading, with the full vigor of his mind, and with all the faculties of an impressed, sharp and firm, at first hands, at first sight (*focie ad faciem*); he thus draws a conclusion which wells forth from the depths of a well-stored memory, and from the mass of his impressions, he will describe the man and his book; but he will so describe them that his tracing rendering the picture will give you the impression to the life, to the very quick. In his description, or rather in his pictorial analyses, his style, as it were pressed, sorted, moving by series, by ranks and unfolding by dense and repeated sallies, by phrases, and, I was going to say, by cross-hatchings deep, short, well bitten and re-bitten, has caused some old-school critic to say of it that it was like hearing the hard, thick nail falling and shipping over a roof. This style produces on the mind, upon the whole, a fixed, inevitable impression, which strikes sometimes into the nerve itself."

With this description, which blends in one lively image both the ideal critic and the individual one we have in view, we have to review, we may withdraw from our self-imposed delineation of the critical faculty in the abstract. But it cannot absolutely necessary in some degree to prepare the reader's mind for the manner of intelligence he will meet with in these pages. The critical faculty then, as demanded by the advance of our age and as cultivated by those who are foremost in the vocation, is a faculty of the immost sympathy to the object of the hour's examination; the perfect critic has no longer an individuality, a stubborness, a prejudice, a life upon his subject, leading upon the air that exhales from his subject, and becomes a chameleon like