

CRITICAL ESSAYS

AND

LITERARY NOTES

BY

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LONDON :

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE, & RIVINGTON.
CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

1880.

PREFACE.

THE following pages may be said to form a sequel to the "Studies in German Literature" published last autumn, inasmuch as they show what the author accomplished in the way of briefer literary and analytical criticism. It was only in the latter part of his very active life, and chiefly by force of circumstance, that he was led—in the midst of other work—to devote himself more earnestly to critical writing, which he considered an assistance toward attaining, but not as being essential to, his great object in life.

After he had arrived at that mature stage of existence, when all the energy inherent in his nature turned toward the higher forms of creative art, he was driven back by an adverse fate to the field of daily journalism, which he had left more than twenty years before, as he then thought never to return. His life consequently became a much more laborious one than ever, not now from free choice as hitherto, but from necessity. Yet, amid the severe pressure of his daily tasks, and the diversity of subjects which came under

his ever ready pen, he never for a moment discarded that strict literary conscience which accompanied him through all the years of his life—from the time when his youthful mind first awoke to the consciousness of an author, until that day arrived when all earthly consciousness ceased for ever. The work he did, either in the service of the paper on whose staff he was employed or for the periodicals that invited his contributions, was done with the same care which he bestowed on all that he wrote for his own purposes and his own special gratification. As the conditioning of things terrestrial calls for light where there is shadow, for compensating circumstances where there are trials, thus, amidst the cloudiness of sore and often uncongenial labor, there were intervals of grateful sunshine. These came when he was called upon to use his higher capabilities for the purpose of pronouncing on the writings of known and famous authors, or the life-work of representative men and women. There were reasons why this task should be enjoyable:—his extensive knowledge, his large personal experience, his intense love for literature and art, and his earnest desire to see the realm of letters grow in excellence and rise to pre-eminence in his own country—all this fitted and inspired him for his work. Minor considerations were of themselves excluded from his critical writings. These were the consummate conclusions of his mature intellect, based on that lofty ideal of beauty which is the true foundation of all Art.

Owing to the small space allowed in journalism, which does not permit any but a brief expression of opinions and criticisms, some of the reviews contained in this volume may appear to be aphoristic; but they will nevertheless not be found wanting in suggestiveness and in depth of thought, and, therefore, they will be of value to the lover of literature.

With the exception of a few articles, such as those on Hebel, Heavyside, Rückert, and Thackeray—the latter consisting of personal reminiscences—the matter included in this volume is the product of a more or less recent date. It has been collected from the pages of *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The International Review*, *Scribner's Magazine*, *The North American Review*, and from the columns of *The New York Tribune*. Most of the "Notes on Books and Events" were originally contributed to the last mentioned journal, from the files of which they have been obtained with the kind and generous assistance of its chief editor. They are but a minute proportion of all of Bayard Taylor's critical and editorial contributions to that paper, and have been selected not merely with regard to their contemporary interest, but also with a view to their possible value to the future student of literature.

The "Days at Weimar" have been included in this volume as possessing a decidedly literary interest, since they give evidence of the researches and studies of the author for that combined Life of Goethe and Schiller,