he quotes the lines so lovely, so instinct with grace and Renaissance beauty of form that none but a supreme poet could have written them:—

Not that fair field
Of Enna, where Proserpin, gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower by gloomy Dis
Was gathered—which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world—

and so on as everyone knows.

Milton was no patriot, the author continues, because he was incapable of disinterested action; everything he did was prompted by his extraordinary craving for fame. His journey to Italy had been a last desperate attempt to force the genius within him to manifest itself; and if on his return he devoted himself to the writing of prose pamphlets on public matters, he did so unwillingly. It is difficult to understand how this could be said of Milton, who at the time of the Italian journey not only aspired to fame but had achieved it. He had already written poetry flawless in form, individual as only the greatest is, as beautiful as anything in English Literature; and the judicious in England and in Italy knew it. Then at the demands of public service, as it seemed to him, he put aside his poetry and turned to controversy and argument, pouring out his tumultuous pamphlets on every important matter of the time. Professor Mutschmann thinks to disparage further Milton’s work, because he finds some words and phrases of these pamphlets repeated in an anonymous tract of the day. He has persuaded himself that this precedes Milton’s work, and rejoices at such evidence of plagiarism. I don’t think anyone else will be persuaded; nor either way do I think it matters. To explain greatness, not to discover flaws in the great: that seems to me the proper and sufficiently difficult task of literary criticism. As Hazlitt puts it, one should endeavour to love the best and to give a reason for the faith that is in one.

LORNA REYNOLDS.

STROLLING PLAYERS AND DRAMA IN THE PROVINCES, 1660—1765. By Sybil Rosenfeld, M.A. Cambridge University Press. 15s.

English imaginative drama has never really recovered from the disastrous destruction of the Jacobean stage, and the effects of that religious persecution remain even to this day. In Victorian memoirs one constantly finds that men of letters abandoned all hope of expressing their ideas in plays and turned to the novel. Mr. Bernard Shaw is almost the only dramatist who succeeded in penetrating the politico-religious defences of the stage censorship.

In an enthusiastic, yet scholarly work of research, Miss Sybil Rosenfeld has rescued from neglect and contempt those wandering players who kept English drama from extinction during the dark days of religious persecution. If martyrs were recognised in art, halos might well be placed on the heads of these happy-go-lucky enthusiasts, who risked imprisonment and endured poverty. These legal rogues and vagabonds, who played Tamerlaine, The Spanish Friar and Romeo and Juliet in barns or stables, were relentlessly pursued by the Common Informer. Noblemen, local magnates, and the plain people contrived, by stratagem and wile, to protect the players and enjoy the great imaginative works of Marlowe, Shakespeare and other poets.