THE ACADEMY.

Englishmen like these domestic personali-
ties. Nor is M. de Lesseps a whit more reticent
than his reviewers. From the pages before
us we learn that his father, Count Mathieu
de Lesseps, political agent of France in Egypt,
when directed by the First Consul to choose an
energetic and intelligent man for the pasha of
Cairo, had the wit to pick out Mohammed Ali, then
an officer commanding a thousand Bashu
Buzaus. Half a century afterwards his son
was put to the test of the object of the
family; especially when he proposed to
carry out a project which had occupied in
1835 the fruitful brain of the "regenerator
of Egypt." His mother was a Spaniard,
thereby securing for him the sympathies of
the Empress, who lost no time in declaring
l'affaire se fera; not to speak of the Em-
peror, who had already, in 1842, pierced, on
paper, Nicaragua for an inter-oceanic Canal
Napoleonic; thus the junction of the two
seas entered into the category of "Napo-
leonic ideas." The great Bonaparte, when
the report of the commission of engi-
neers, headed by M. Lepère, established the
feasibility of the "Egyptian Bosphorus,"
which, as it were, belonged to man's highest
intellect, La chose est grande; ce ne sera pas
moi qui, maintenant, pourra l'accomplir, mais
le gouvernement turc trouvera peut-être un jour
sa gloire dans l'exécution de ce projet. And
the nephew of his uncle was equally persuaded
that the grande entreprise civile et militaire
de M. de Lesseps, Comte Théodore, Directeur
des Affaires Étrangères, and he had
other relatives distinguished in the diplo-
matic service. Born in 1805, he first visited
Alexandria in 1832, and there the young
Edouard-Comte applied himself, he assures us,
though, to the study of a movement which has occu-
pied a score of years and more of his riper
life. In 1852, he became Ministre des Consul-
General for Alexandria, and was French
Minister at Rome in 1852; but abandoned
the diplomatic service the better to work out
his gigantic project. Under these circum-
stances it is not to be wondered at that he
received the direct, as well as the indirect,
influence of a host of powerful friends; such
as Drony de Lhuys, Walein, and Fiolin
(de Persigny); Thiers, Guizot, and Fould;
Thouvenel, Benedetti, Sabatier, and Clot-
Bey, Jomard, Morre, Émile de Girardin,
and Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire; Mohammed-
Sk'd Pasha and his family, Rashid Pasha,
Aal Pasha, Kasim-Boy, and Zulfiakar Pasha.
Among these, however, the bulk of letters,
journals, and papers have not been
"doctored"—and their incessant repetitions
and iterations seem to vouch that they are
genuine—the general reader will find them
most valuable documents pour servir; he has,
in fact, a single work containing the whole
history of this gigantic undertaking from the
hand of the man who made the history.
The dry course of events is relieved by the
journals, most of which are accounts of
short trips, addressed to the author's
mother-in-law, M'dme. Delamalle; and they
are charming for minceé and clever pic-
turesque delineations. All reports also are full of valuable matter. The whole of the
work is a most intelligible in-
tellectual portrait of the Franco-Spaniard
who, like Napoleon the Great, a Franco-
Italian if one ever was, evidently belongs,
racially and by nature, not to the French
but to the Latins. By nature he is ultra-
Gallic, a Frenchman of the old school; hating
England, and touchingly showing how thin
is the varnish of friendly union which com-
mons interest has spread over the patched-up
"solidarity" between ourselves and our
"natural enemies."

M. de Lesseps proves himself a many-
sided man, possessed of, or rather objec-
to, a dominant idea. He has Suez Canal
on the brain. He holds the golden keys of
the Orient. It is the manifest destiny of this
point of progress to marry the two seas,
aparejo terras gentibus. Whatever happens,
Crimson war, an Indian mutiny, a massa-
cere at Jeddah, all turns to the profit of
the bo-all and end-all of his life. He is a good
hater. Words cannot express his contempt for
his opponents, especially the Government of
England and the few sensible English who
saw further into the future than he did. He
thoroughly believes himself when he talks of
la vieille politique égipcie, and of the
autonomie inscrivible de la grande Bretagne.
His denunciation of the Sciocks by bille as
to exclaim, very unidiomatically,
tout cela est très perfide; to talk of "aburd
subterfuges"—"aburd" is a favourite
word; to declaim against une opposition
aussi brutale que l'incendie. His adversaries
are idee de bois, and visages de bois. One
of his telegrams runs as follows:—M. de
Lesseps, vicomte de Sers, Anglais. C'est
une prétention absurde. Personne ne s'attache
ea percoon sanction. He vents his wrath,
in letter after letter, page after page, upon
ses fidèles alliés d'autre mauche, with their orgueil
iné et their ignorance insultante, as if any
public, save that of Central Africa, could be
more generally ignorant than the mass of
unducated Frenchmen. England is openly
and falsely charged with robbing Turkey of evacuated
Aden and Perim; and with a mean and selfish
desire to make the Viceroy of Egypt a kind
of Indian Rajah. Lord Palmerston talks more like a maniac than a statesman; some-
ing of the same kind was said of Mr.
Premier by Jules Favre, and, probably, for
the same reason. Lord Stratford de Red-
ciffe, besides being the most tyrannical
of ambassadors, is an incarnation of the diaboli-
cal Englishman, with the brain of a Macchiavelli
and the heart of a Borgia, once so firm-
lone and steadfast in European out-
mental. Lord Dalling is little better;
he begins well and ends badly. Alison
and Green are simply despicable. Poor Robert
Stephenson is the "Aunt Sally" of the
work; he is perpetually being set up to be
knocked down, and Letter xx. (vol. ii. p. 109)
is simply a carte, a challenge to fight. A man
who can, with all the faith in the world as
M. de Lesseps must become a mass of contradic-
tions, partly because he looks to l'unité des
résultats plutôt que celle des moyens. He
boasts of his complete frankness; je joue
cartes sur table, and so forth. Yet he can
budge, has no abstractions to Mr.
Cardinal, and he plays with his public. Sans
refuser, sans décourager personne, j'ajourne.
We have also, at times, an uneasy sensation
that certain of the letters addressed to him were not intended for the public eye. The Times is quoted to show that we are the first of Mussulman powers: Lord Ellenborough to advocate our planting one foot in India and the other in Egypt; in fact every loose statement is pressed into the indictment against England. He can butt and still appear subservient; after well defining the timidity of that miserable, crooked-minded bigot, the late Aali Pasha, he addresses his esprit droit et éclairé. He has a warm heart, but he pitilessly throws overboard a friend who dares to tamper with the Suez, and would rather see the Suez disappear from the face of the earth than change the case of M. Artaud-Durfort of the Société d'Études (Letter III). He has in quinticite in dealing with Orientals; yet he smites them on the hip when requisite, quoting their own proverb, an ounce of fear weighs more than a ton of friendship.

And he has the acumen to observe, le temps est toujours sàffisant des Tres beaux projets que vous portez, mais il y a souvent le revers de la médaille; to speak of debt-paying or concession-granting with an Osmanli is the touch of Ithuriel's spear.

This indomitable energy has the patience of strength. The man lays down his plan of action for the Suez Canal and San José in Idaho and makes an end of it. He cannot but feel, instinctively, that the whole is a mistake; that a fresh-water canal, with sluice-gates, like that of Ptolemy Philadelphia, would have created another Nile-valley; but we should find it difficult to work out the idea. In these days of agiotage and surprises, he will have more real friends and less enemies among his Englishmen; for instance, Gibbon, in obtaining a concession for his telegraph-line, and Chenevix for his Ephrathas Valley railway. The Président-fondateur of the Compagnie universelle sometimes nearly loses patience and talks of appealing, as a Français l'est dans ses droits, to his sovereign and his ambassador; but presently his habitual calmness returns; he remembers his resolution that the canal shall be a concession to a company of limited liability, directly granted for ninety-nine years by the Vicerey of Egypt, and by him only. He wisely avoids creating political questions and "détournez de ma ligne". He dislikes that familiar signboard, I am sure; any complication might lead to a war which would hinder his canal. Finally, after five years wasted in trying to secure the official ratification of the Porte, he boldly cuts the Gordian knot by assuming the "officious" adhesion of the Sultan and his ministry, who were completely opposed to it.

These few details are taken from the book itself, and the result is the portraiture of a very remarkable man. An analysis of the two volumes would be, methinks, the fittest form of reviewing them; and their mass of heterogeneous matter falls readily into three several periods. The first is that of incuba-

* A modern writer on Egypt actually degrades this ill-treated word to "Keldive" with the ridiculous French accent thrown at us, usual on the last syllable. The word is now quite obsolete: the vicerey wanted to be made "Aziz El Min," the Koranic title given to Joseph of the Josephine; but the Sultan was not prepared to go so far as that.
direct geographical miles, between N. Lat. 29° 58' 37", and 31° 3' 37", from Suez to Pelusium, or Tineh, "the place of mad," afterwards changed for Port Said, further west. The breadth was to be 100 metres, and the depth six, seven, and eight, both measured from low water in the Mediterranean; the latter figure was afterwards increased to ten. For the alimentation of the labourers, and the irrigation of the extensive lands three miles on each side of the line, mostly black mud and tawny sand, and tenanted, a subsidiary canal of communication would be derived from the Nile between Cairo and the passage; thence it would flow down the Wady Tomilat, the heart of ancient Goshen, and a natural back-water of the high Nile, finally to abut upon the Timsah Lake. Again this part of the plan was modified by making the rigole, as it was popularly called, divide into two falls near L. Timsah: the northern would flow to the Mediterranean and the southern to Suez. I need hardly say that the latter was never done, and that at the present moment (January, 1876) M. de Lesseps is trying for permission to derive a sweet-water canal from Manzilah, whilst Imaum Pasha hesitates. From this subsidiary work, down which it is now proposed to send all the native craft which ply between the Nile and the sea, the reader may form a proportionate idea of le grand, le sublime projet d'utilité universelle, namely, the main canal.

In fact, the speculative investment by the concessionnaire to the two engineers (Cairo, January 15, 1855) show the whole project issuing, like a panoplied Minerva, from the fertile brain of the Franco-Spanish Jupiter. M. de Lesseps will bear correction; but he will break no change. After having once determined, upon the soundest grounds, his line of march, he adheres to it with characteristic tenacity, and with a rare devotion to his beau ideal.

For there were two counter-projects in the field. The first, which we may call the French, represented by M. Talabot, proposed to make the Suez Canal an indirect line, crossing the Nile and ending at Alexandria, a distance of over 140 miles. The second was the English, a dream worthy of Laputa; this "hanging canal," with its vast array of flood-gates, was to flow upon a sandy surface between two huge lines of berjes, or spoil-banks, which any miserable tribe of Bedawin could have cut through in a week. It was a romantic idea, and evinced our mental culmination when we read their mad scheme of our engineering fellow-countrymen.

Richard F. Burton.

King Erik. By Edmund W. Gosse. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1876.)

Nothing, we suppose, will deny that there is hardly a more critical point in a poet's career than the publication of his first tragedy. Space would fail anyone who should attempt to catalogue the names of those who, with a perfect reputation or defaced one already assured by their first venture on this most perilous poetical path, and it may safely be assumed that Job, had he lived a few thousand years later, would have refined upon even the subtle malice of his famous wish, and have substituted "O that mine enemy had written a tragedy!" for the more general malice. It is not, perhaps, very easy to decide on the causes which make tragedy so dangerous, unless it be that in this species of poetry alone are we generally convinced of the unapproachable excellence of the famous men our fathers who have gone before us. Lyrics we can write with the best singer that ever touched a harp, but we are wholly disposed to "confess and avoid." But there appears to be a certain vague excellence in the tragic drama which is all the more desperate of attainment because it is so excellent and so vague. It might be possible to catch for a moment and express the charm of song or of tale in something like a satisfactory manner of adornment. But such a possibility is not to be dreamt of as we contemplate the Ageanion or King Lear, Tamburlaine or Vittoria Corbromba, and we are content to sit and have our emotions purified by pity and terror, without having the least understanding of the process, in some cases without the least faith in the existence of events at all. Most people have a confused idea that tragedy is something very great, the secret of which was lost at or about the year 1660 after Christ, and that is all.

We were therefore in some pain for Mr. Gosse when we first took up King Erik. He had no former book, On Viol and Flute, though not free from the peremptory display of a remark which is not very ornamental, not very useful, but is of such a marvellous sort as to make it impossible to pass over, - a remarkable ear for music, such a singular poetic interpretation of flowers and trees, and such like children of Flora, and above all, such a distinct and individual poetic savour, that it would have been a pity indeed had these good gifts been wasted in any wrong direction. In this case things are happy, for no cause for such pity.

We have seldom seen such a marked advance in a second book beyond a first, and this not at all insuch as a tragedy is a thing and a volume of occasional poems is only a collection of little things (for we hold a sonnet to be potentially equal to an epic), but simply because the work is better done and the ideal more fully attained.

The story of Mr. Gosse's play is as follows. Erik, King of Denmark, has succeeded to a kingdom assailed by enemies at home and abroad, and has given it peace and safety. The play opens with his expected return from a cruise to the Barents, and inures of the Baltic. We are introduced to the Queen Botilda with her maids, and soon after to a certain skald, Grimur by name, Danish (at least Icelandic) by birth, but in nature and ways smacking rather of the Greeks and Italy where he has loved best to abide. It is evident that he has received for her something between a fancy and a passion, and the Queen-mother Adalbjorg, assisted by one of her daughter-in-law's maids (who has a secret love for Erik), is not slow to take advantage of this to play the King's jealousy. This is skilfully done both on the writer's part and the actor's; it seems to be assisted by a combination of cross accidents which makes the Queen on a pilgrimage to the very place whither Grimur is known to have gone, and brings him back to an apparently preconcerted moonlight tryst when her pilgrimage is abruptly stopped. Botilda meets her lover (now at last known by her to be so) and tells him how utterly her love is reserved for her husband. Erik comes in and, stung by a gesture of Grimur, stabs and slays him. Now it so happens that the King has but a little before solemnly denounced private bloodshedding, and proclaimed penalties on manslaughter. The Bishop of Lund refuses him the entrance of his church and urges the crime he has committed in slaying an innocent man. Erik repents, and being convinced of his wife's purity is reconciled to her, but not before he has vowed a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in expiation of his sin, a vow which he insists on carrying out notwithstanding the dismay of his subjects at his departure. Botilda accompanies him and they journey by Constantinople, where Grimur's sworn brother, a Varangian, hears of the murder and swears to avenge it. He accomplishes his oath in Cyprus, and the play ends.

This is a good fable, and it is well and worth carrying out. It will be seen at once that the interest of the whole turns on Botilda's unconsciousness of the passion she has excited. In setting forth it must have been no easy matter to avoid giving the idea of thoughtless coquetry on the one hand or of stupid impassiveness on the other. But Mr. Gosse has achieved his task. The central scene—the moonlight meeting—is really a gem of character as well as of language, and Botilda's part throughout is nearly faultless. The author's success with his feminine characters is indeed remarkable. Svanilda, the treacherous (and yet only half-treacherous) handmaiden, is admirable, and so is Adalbjorg, with her dull malevolence, while even the slighter parts of Thora (the other maid of honour) and the Princess Anna Connena, show equal thought and skill. The men are perhaps not quite so good. Erik talks too much and loses his temper too readily. He would hardly, we think, have been quite so inquisitive or to have taken such a snub with Svanilda, and with due deference to Mr. Gosse's infinitely superior knowledge of matters Scandinavian, we can hardly think that a Danish king in 1103 would have given his mother such a very minute description of his interview with his wife. Marcus, another skald, who has turned out to be this new skald, is a sub-comic air into some of his scenes which, despite high precedent, we do not altogether like. But Grimur and the Archbishop are very good. The light nature of the former—a Provençal strayed—is given with equal force and with no exaggeration. Indeed the play—and it could possess no rarer merit—is actually and really that nobly and not merely a dramatic poem of more or less excellence. The merely poetical merits of the book are, however, such as would suffice to place it high. The blank verse in which it is written is of good quality, reminding one at times of Shakespeare's more accurate seem to be assisted by a combination of cross accidents which makes the Queen on a pilgrimage to the very place whither Grimur