

## Recent Fiction.\*

THOSE who have read the former works of "Kim Biler" will probably get "Gemini and Lesser Lights," another volume of short stories, and to those who are not acquainted with his writings we can recommend them. It is one more good volume of fiction from a Canadian pen. The scene of the stories is chiefly in Turkey, Monti-Negro, and Bulgaria, and they make the life there very realistic to the reader. "Three Ones," the second in the book, is one of the best, we think. It shows the procrastination and absolute rottenness of the Turkish Government by a personal and concrete example. They send for an English naval officer to act as a pretence for reforms in the fleet. He is given a good salary, but is quite unable to get an interview with the responsible officials in order to find out what he has to do. He chafes under the inaction and uncertainty, and is saved from madness only by throwing up his position. It is another instance of the verse of Kipling's. "It is not good for the Christian white to hustle the Aryan brown," etc. On one occasion he hoped to see the Minister of Marine on the following day, and mentioned this to the narrator who replied:

"To-morrow *Ramazan* begins."

"Well, what has *Ramazan*, as you call it, got to do with the question?"

"Everything! Know, oh impetuous, hasty, vehement, precipitate headstrong child of the Occident, that *Ramazan* is the Mohammedan Month of fasting; that it begins to night and will last for twenty-eight days; that for the coming four weeks the Turks—Minister of Marine included—will fast by day and feast by night; that official business will be altogether at a standstill, and that your chance of seeing His Excellency in *Ramazan* is not worth five minutes purchase. Then follows a week of feasting, *Bairam*, during which period official business is also suspended. . . . Then there will be the arrears represented by the accumulation of back work at the Admiralty to make up which will certainly take a fortnight or three weeks, so that you see you may reckon on a couple of months' undisturbed devotion to Turkish."

Christian's face during my recital of what he evidently considered his personal wrongs, was a sight to behold. When I had finished he swore. . . . Under the circumstances we all forgave him, and, if I remember rightly, several of us made mental notes of some of his most forcible expressions, and even made use of them on subsequent occasions. Such is the force of evil example!

"The Gift of the Bridegroom" is an amusing instance of the way lovers manage to surmount seemingly impossible barriers and to secure a moderate dowry at the same time. Other stories are equally interesting, and one called "An Armenian Atrocity," is not likely to excite sympathy for that unfortunate race.

This latest work of George Meredith's has formed, with Hardy's "Jude the Obscure," the occasion for the *bon mot* "The Amazing Hardy, and Meredith the Obscure." But the obscurity which has dismayed a number of readers of this famous novelist's other works is not so aggravating in this book, though in the early part we echoed with all our heart the sentence we read: "We are in a perfect tangle." However, things straightened out after a while, and then they struck us as being quite needlessly involved. We were soon interested in the story of Chillon and Carinthia Kirby, an English brother and sister brought up abroad, Lord Fleetwood who presently marries Carinthia—the "amazing marriage" which gives the book its title and which does not seem to bring much happiness to either of the parties,—a Mr. Woodseer, and Henriette Fakenham who marries Chillon, Lord Fleetwood having also been attached to her. The main part of the book is taken up with the story of their lives for some subsequent months, and is told in a way, which is sure, we think, to add further laurels to the al-

ready high position Mr. Meredith holds for psychological insight and delineation of character. Amongst the many striking descriptive passages which adorn the book is one on a mountain walk in mist and sunshine which is full of the most beautiful word-painting, and shows how the author can delineate external nature as well as the emotions of the heart. Incidentally we are introduced to the life of English people at the gaming tables on the continent in the early part of this century, and the Black Goddess Fortune is depicted with the ups and downs which she brings to those who are mad enough to tempt her wiles.

"Macaire" is a play with full stage directions, but we are doubtful how it would "take" with an audience though it is interesting enough for the reader. The more we read of Robert Louis Stevenson's writings, the more we are impressed with the sense of how great a loss his early death was to the English-speaking world. The plot of "Macaire" is simple. He is an escaped convict, and with a friend in misfortune—reminding one of the two thieves in "Erminie"—comes to an inn where a wedding is to be celebrated. Complications in the wedding arise, however, when the bridegroom, reputed son of the landlord, is declared by the latter to have been a foundling left on the doorstep. Macaire presently, hearing this, puts forward a false claim to have been the father, and supports his claims by some trickery. Presently the real father, a Marquis, turns up, having heard of the approaching marriage of his son. Macaire attempts a murder, but unsuccessfully, it turns out, though we are left in doubt to the very end, and the good d'armes arrive in the nick of time. There are several good situations and the dialogue reads brightly throughout.

Of the seven short stories which make up the volume entitled "The Gypsy Christ," the one which gives the name to the book is perhaps the best. It is something like "The Wandering Jew" in conception. There is the same idea of mocking at the crucifixion and a sentence pronounced, but in this case it is carried out, not on the individual but on the generations that come after, and specially in the case of each third generation. Fortunately the line of descendants does not expand. One of the descendants, suffering from the horror of the sentence and almost mad, tells the story of his gypsy ancestry to his friend, dealing specially with the last ten or twelve generations. The story is told in a house situated on a lonely moor in a bleak and desolate region, and all the weather accompaniments are pictured as heightening the ghastliness of the narrative. The name itself is taken from the prediction, hitherto unfulfilled, delivered by the woman who was the ancestress of the family that from her offspring one would arise to redeem the gypsy race, who in other words would be the Gypsy Christ. Another story which struck us is called "The Graven Image." By the way, the style is at times very jarring as in the sentence: "The dull sound of the wind had grown to a moaning sigh, that, in my *then* mood, could be *hearkened* with equanimity only in affluence of light and comfort." The story is better than the style.

"His Father's Son" is a story of life in New York among the business men of Wall street. Thousands of dollars are tossed about as recklessly as cents. The subjects are chiefly the Pierce family—Ezra, and his son, Winslow—and Mary Romeyn who becomes the wife of the latter soon after the story opens. The usual struggles go on between the millionaires, fighting one another through their stocks, sometimes making and sometimes losing a million or two over a transaction, and letting their personal resentments influence them in the depreciation of stocks when they can by this means strike an opponent. The author is well known as a writer of interesting novels and this is no exception. We wonder if he holds the view one of his characters does that the writings of Dickens are "cheap caricature and tawdry pathos." But Ezra, the hard-headed speculator, was himself fond of Dickens, who was the only novelist he cared for, and the verdict of the reading public has pretty well settled his place in literature. The story deals with the rapid deterioration of Winslow Pierce as soon as he has too much money of his own to spend. The self-delusion or hypocrisy of his money-making father is powerfully drawn and the book itself is of the nature of an attack on the pitilessness of the manipulation of the stock market in the hands of unscrupulous millionaires.

\* "Gemini and Lesser Lights." By Kim Biler, author of "Three Letters of Credit"; "As it was in the Fifties." Victoria, B.C. The Province Publishing Co. 1895.

"The Amazing Marriage" By George Meredith. New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons; Toronto: Wm. Briggs. 2 Vols. Indian and Colonial Library. London: George Bell & Sons; Toronto: The Copp, Clark Co. 1 Vol.

"Macaire: A Melodramatic Farce" By Robert Louis Stevenson and William Earnest Healey. Chicago: Stone & Kimball. 1895.

"The Gypsy Christ and Other Tales" By William Sharp. Chicago: Stone & Kimball. Carnation Series. \$1.00.

"His Father's Son." By Brander Matthews. London: Longmans, Green & Co.; Toronto: The Copp, Clark Co. Longmans' Colonial Library.