READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

LOVE'S ROSARY.

I know a villa in a quiet park,
Where Love abides and smiles at Winter's rage,
And seems indifferent to patronage
As the song of the heav'nward lark.
But, when Spring comes with verdure kindling spark,
Spontan'ously it blossoms to a blaze
Of glorious light, as 'twere a golden haze
Illumining the landscape, sere and dark.
I had not known mine own heart's emptiness,
And drear soul's poverty; nor could I guess
How much a look of love had subtle power
To banish Winter in one radiant hour.
Ah! Love gives life transpicuous sunniness!
Plants in the heart's desert a royal flower.

—*Hamilton Galt, in the Book World.*

ROMANCE AND REALITY.

In an introduction to the edition of George Meredith's "Tragic Comedians," just issued by Roberts Bros., Mr. Clement Shorter gives the real story on which Meredith founded his romance—the story of Ferdinand Lassalle and Helen von Dönniges. It is a romantic story—one of the most romantic I have ever read; but what particularly interests me in it, is the fact that a few years ago I used often to see the heroine of the tale right here in unromantic New York. She was then married to a Russian Socialist named Shevitch (Count Shevitch, he was called, for even Socialists share the human weakness for titles)—a big, heavily-bearded, rather distinguished-looking man, who edited a Socialistic journal in this city, though he made his home in Hoboken. The Count and Countess Shevitch were great "first-nighters" ten or twelve years ago, and I have frequently seen them together at the theatre and opera. It was impossible to be in the same place with them and not see them, he being conspicuous by his size and she by her wealth of golden hair, which she dressed in a manner to show it off to advantage. She was a handsome woman even then, and looked every inch the heroine of a romance. The last time I saw her she was buying stockings in a Broadway shop. I made some pretext for stopping at the same counter, so that I could get a better look at her. She had grown stout, and there were signs of advancing age about her face; but it was still very striking, and the yellow hair had only a thread or two of silver in it. She was evidently a careful buyer, for she examined the stockings knowingly, and held them up to the light to see if they had "double soles and heels," and asked if they were warranted "fast colours." As she walked away, after having made her purchase, I felt like telling the "saleslady" who she was; but it occurred to me that I should probably have to tell her who Lassalle and George Meredith were, too, and I did not feel equal to the task. It has been so long since I saw the Countess Shevitch that I have wondered what had become of her. In his introduction Mr. Shorter says that she and her husband have returned to Russia, and are living at Riga, and I have no doubt they find better opportunities for carrying out their Socialistic schemes there than in prosaic Hoboken.—*The Critic.*

AMERICAN GIRLS AND ENGLISHMEN.

"It would puzzle an outsider, especially a man," says a writer in the San Francisco *Argonaut*, "to tell why American women find Englishmen so much more attractive than American. At any gathering—a tennis party, a lawn *fête*, a dinner, a dance, a tea, the Englishman is in the ascendant. It is obvious to the most superficial observer that the women find him a more charming companion than the men of their own country. The writer asked the reason and an American lady said: 'When an Englishman is introduced to us he opens the conversation and makes it (?). He doesn't always do this well, but he relieves us of what is sometimes a terrible piece of work. The American leaves it all to us, and often, if he is not interested in us as an individual entity, he does not even accord to us that half-hearted help to which we are accustomed. Then, when the ice is broken, the Englishman goes on and entertains us (?). Sometimes he is not madly interesting, but he always talks "as well" as his mental equipment will allow, and he never slights his work. Sometimes he is delightfully amusing, and we sit back and laugh, and have the loveliest, lazy, comfortable feeling that we can lounge and rest, and talk or stay quiet just as we like.' 'And how is it that the Englishman has learned this happy trick that we have missed?' 'Oh, he has had to learn it. There couldn't have been any conversation on the British Isles unless he did. Englishwomen never talk. They respond. In moments of wild vivacity they go so far as to agree. Someone has got to do the talking, and if the Englishman hadn't braced up and undertaken it, conversation in England would have become one of the lost arts.' 'Certainly, Englishwomen are not very popular over here. We find them slow and somewhat dull.' 'That's exactly it. They are not either, but they seem so to you. Now generations of conversational training, with an Englishwoman to talk at, will bring out the best there is in a man. You try talking, for a whole afternoon, to one of those large, handsome English girls who are sitting over there under the white sunshades. If you succeed I will back you to be able to draw ideas and witticisms out of the *débutantes* of the coming winter.'"

CAUSES OF POVERTY.

Some interesting statistics are published in a London journal relating to an exhaustive enquiry into the causes of the poverty of 152 families in a certain city district containing a population of 126,000. These families presented a wide variety in trade and religion and nationality, and their application for charitable assistance was taken as *prima facie* and confessed evidence of poverty. Investigation shows that forty-two families were brought to want by their own fault, the causes of their poverty being set down as "reckless improvidence," "crime," "drink," "idleness," "bad temper," etc. Then come fifty-three families whose poverty was due to certain common accidents or misfortunes which might have been provided against, but were not. The final group of fifty-seven families presents cases of excusable poverty, such as those due to extraordinary slackness of trade or the absolute destruction of some branch of business, though even in this group appear twenty-one families who are made hopelessly poor by "incompetence." The whole result goes to show the untrustworthiness of the figures often cited of the number of persons in London and other cities who are unemployed, and said to be "able and willing to work if they could only get employment." A similar conclusion is led up to by an article of Prof. Hyslop's in a late issue of the New York *Independent*, in which he showed the astonishingly high percentage of the unworthy who apply to charitable organizations in this city for aid.

THE SIN OF JUDAS.

To this there is one decisive answer. The Gospel narrative gives no intimation that this, or anything like this, was his motive. On the contrary, they suggest a very different view of Judas' character. "This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare (or purloined) what was put therein." He had misappropriated the general funds, as we should say, in delicate modern phrase; the Evangelist knows nothing of delicate modern phrases, and calls it thieving. He had allowed one vile passion to grow unchecked in his heart. His office, as treasurer of the little company, had given him opportunities of indulging this passion. He had yielded, and so fell. But, after all, does this painful history really contradict our experience? Experience may not carry us to the extreme point where Judas' transgression lies; but, so far as it goes, it only confirms this strange contradiction. For it teaches that the moral character by no means keeps pace with the moral opportunities; nay, it shows that when a man, placed in a position eminently favourable to the development of his higher self, does nevertheless give the rein to some vicious tendency within, his vice seems to gain strength by this very fact. It can only be indulged by resistance to the good influences about him, and resistance always gives compactness and force, always braces the capacity, whether for good or for evil. Moreover, such a man gets to isolate his vicious passion from the surrounding circumstances, even from the better influences within himself. If he did not, his relations with those about him would be intolerable; the conflict in his own heart would be too agonizing. But when, gradually and half-unconsciously, he has got to treat his special temptation as something apart, to concede to it a special privilege, to regard it as a law to itself, then the moral checks are removed; then it thrives, uninterrupted and almost unnoticed; until at length it casts away its disguises, it throws off all control, and reveals itself in all its vile deformity.—*From sermons by the late Joseph Barber Lightfoot, D.D.*

NOVELS AND CIRCULATING LIBRARIES.

The novelist's trade, like that of him who gathers samphire, is "dreadful." There is far too much competition. If you want a box of books from a circulating library, the chances are that you get seven volumes which you never asked for to three which you did demand. Nobody asks for those superfluous seven—nobody but friends of the authors. Probably ladies read them when they find them in the box, but nobody wants them. They never would be missed. Their existence manifestly interferes with the success of which books are in demand. Suppose that circulating libraries, instead of buying many small doses of rubbish, were to spend the money in getting more copies of good, or at least of popular, new novels, then the amateurs and weaklings of romance would be driven out of the business, and from the libraries we might get the works we ask for. I have just observed a student marking the library catalogue. Out of 270 novels of the year, 254 were erased, and it was communicated to the librarian that none of these were to be sent on any account. Perhaps two dozen of them had been read before and so were not needed; the remaining 230 were manifestly trash. There were left sixteen, of which twelve at least were experimental. Only four were asked for in anything like assured hope of entertainment. Of lady novelists there were eighty-one. Of domestic and tea-table novels there were forty. Of novels about American women there were six; of military and sporting romances twelve; of historical novels only five. There were about ten sensational novels. Then there were Dutch, Irish, Australian Arabic, Bohemian, Hungarian, Indian novels, and of Egyptian novels and novels in No Man's Land about five. There were not so many socialistic, occult and theological novels as one might expect, while governesses and the clergy were in a minute minority. Of novels that a male human being might read, there were about forty out of the grand total of 270, and that is really a very fair proportion. The rest were all for ladies, who in these cases are apt to let the supply regulate the demand. Ah, that authors would not write, that publishers would not publish, that libraries would not buy the common, mild, middle-class domestic novel any more! The writers who have succeeded in that style may be counted on the fingers of one hand, and yet that is the style which men and women, with no qualification but leisure, are always attempting.—*Andrew Lang, in Longman's Magazine.*

UNDER THE EARTH.

The workman in the deepest mines of Europe swelter in almost intolerable heat, and yet they never penetrate over one 7-1000 part of the distance from the surface to the centre of the earth. In the lower levels of some of the Comstock mines the men fought scalding water, and could labour only three or four hours at a time until the Sutro tunnel pierced the mines and drew off some of the terrible heat, which had stood at 120°. The deepest boring ever made, that at Sperenberg, near Berlin, penetrates only 4,172 feet, about 1,000 feet deeper than the famous artesian well at St. Louis. While borings and mines reveal to us only a few secrets relating solely to the temperature and constitution of the earth for a few thousand feet below the surface, we are able by means of volcanoes to form some notion of what is going on at a greater depth. There have been many theories about the causes of volcanoes, but it is now generally held that, though they are produced by the intense heat of the interior of the earth, they are not directly connected with the molten mass that lies many miles below the immediate sources of volcanic energy. Everybody knows that many rocks are formed on the floor of the ocean, and it has been found that a twentieth to a seventieth of their weight is made up of imprisoned water. Now, these rocks are buried in time under overlaying strata, which serve as a blanket to keep the enormous heat of the interior. This heat turns the water into superheated steam, which melts the hardest rock, and when the steam finds a fissure in the strata above it it breaks through to the surface with terrific energy, and we have a volcano. We find that these outpourings that have lain for countless ages many thousands of feet below the surface are well adapted to serve the purposes of man. Many a vineyard flourishes on the volcanic ashes from Vesuvius, and volcanic mud has clothed the hills of New Zealand with fine forests and its plains with luxuriant verdure. The most wonderful display of the results of volcanic energy is seen in the north-western corner of our own land, a region of lofty forests and of great fertility.—*Goldthwaite's Magazine.*

THE ETHICS OF FICTION.

How can the story-teller evade the responsibility of a moral agent? We do not project the didactic question, nor do we suggest the need of goody-goody stories. We drive at the question of personal influence and personal responsibility. What one does by one's agent is one's own act. The story is the story-writer's agent. If it is a doer of evil, its deeds are to be referred to the writer. The ethical problem seems to be: How far can the story-maker go in handling evil without becoming amenable to the moral law? We think it is plain that evil cannot be honestly handled by the artist for the mere sake of presenting it artistically. To admit that the story-teller may lead us to admire the character and to enjoy the company of men and women whose lives are given over to all manner of moral obliquity is to admit, tacitly at least, that we may safely associate with and admire such people in actual life. If evil communications corrupt good manners in our social experiences, the same is true in our literary experiences. It seems to us that in good fiction evil must appear as a foil for good; that it must be set over against righteousness so as to make black black indeed and white purely white. The story-teller need have no express moral hobby to ride posthaste; his tale will be all the better if told with the pure love of story-telling; but we may be quite sure that his taste is unsound if he chooses a salacious story to tell and gives it the unction of personal rehearsal. Here, indeed, is where we would draw the line. Evil can be used by the artist with clean hands and to wholesome effect by contrasting it with a healthy, solid projection of good. The chief trouble with current realism is that it does not do this, but chooses to set hopeless evil and nerveless commonplace side by side without any triumphant moral heroism to dominate or neutralize it. The scope of story-telling is as broad as life, and the gamut of human experience is open to the artist's selection. What is required by sound ethics is that the selection shall be made under the guidance of an enlightened and eminently sane conscience, and that the story shall, in its artistic and moral trend, comport with the best impulses of our civilization.—*The Chautauquan for February.*

According to the Boston *Transcript* the production of paper in the entire world is estimated to be 3,000,000,000 pounds per year. There are 884 paper mills and 1,106 paper machines in this country. Germany has 809 mills and 891 machines, France 420 mills and 525 machines, England 361 mills and 541 machines, Scotland 69 mills and 98 machines, Ireland 13 mills and 13 machines, Russia 133 mills and 137 machines, and Austria 220 mills and 270 machines.