

RECOLLECTIONS OF A CONVICT—RY Y-LE.

WHETHER this be a fictitious story, or an authentic biographical history, we cannot tell, or at least we might have found it difficult to determine, had not the author, in his introduction, declared it to be a true and faithful narrative. This, of course, we are bound to believe, and consequently cannot treat it as a fiction.

While we cannot but give the author credit for considerable ability, of which the little book before us furnishes abundant evidence, we cannot subscribe to his clever and ingenious plea for anticipating, if not disarming criticism, by stating that from six years of age he had been compelled to earn his own subsistence, and that consequently any education he has received has been the result of chance, not of arrangement. On the contrary, this very circumstance makes it more imperatively incumbent upon us to point out its various faults and deficiencies, if for no other reason than to prove to our readers the necessity and importance of education in the publication even of so trifling a work as the one before us. The author, however, may rest assured that his deprecatory request shall be so far regarded as to induce us to deal with him as gently and leniently as we conscientiously can.

We are sorry to be compelled, in the outset, to state that the story is sadly deficient in circumstantial evidence as to its authenticity. As regards incidents and circumstances illustrative of the habits and customs of the inhabitants of that penal colony, particularly relating to the convicts, the statements are very erroneous, and calculated to produce impressions "wide as the poles asunder." from the truth. Besides, what little there is of such collateral evidence, is destitute of all those peculiar characteristics which constitute the most striking features in every department of nature, in that strange and extraordinary country, where the "rocks themselves to ruin grow," or rather have grown, all but a portion here and there as pillars to support the superincumbent earth, and where spacious subterranean plains and valleys now are found where once the rocks have been, with deep and darkling rivers flowing through them, "all measureless to man"—where the wild animals, in their young and defenceless state, can return at pleasure to the place from whence they came, or to something very like it—where frost and snow are never known, although in nearly the same parallel of latitude in the southern hemisphere with that occupied by a portion of the Spanish Peninsula in the eastern, and of North Carolina in the western sections of the Northern,

which are familiar with both,—where it does not rain sometimes for years*—where trees apparently grow with the wrong end up—where, in short, all our preconceived notions, as to the regularity of nature and her works, are turned topsy turvy; and to such an extent too has the history of this strange country confused our ideas, that we can almost subscribe to the assertion of a certain veracious traveller, that the inhabitants of the moon carry their heads under their arms.

No! not a word—not a hint—not even a distant allusion to the peculiar circumstances we have mentioned, is to be found in the "Recollections of a Convict," although he had resided for years in that strangest of all strange countries. For all the author tells us, the scene of his sufferings might have been laid as well in Canada, New Brunswick, or any other newly settled country, as in New South Wales.

This defect, in the abstract, is of little consequence, and therefore might be deemed a venial one; but when brought to bear upon the authenticity of the work,—the only ground upon which any real interest in it could be felt,—it becomes a matter of importance, inasmuch as by leading us to doubt the truth of the story, it deadens, if it does not paralyze our sympathies with the suffering subject of it.

We promised to refrain from unnecessary severity, and we give the following as a specimen of the author's style, and as a proof of our forbearance:

"We have all a beginning in life, and that beginning, so long as our shield of second causes remain, is more likely to be one of innocence than of vice; but should He, in whose hands is the issue of all things, be pleased to take from us that shield, our life, taking the world as it is, is more likely to be influenced by evil than good; as there are few hands or hearts—few indeed—willing to help or feel for the sorrows of a parentless or a fatherless child. The foregoing I take for granted, as, had it been otherwise in my own case, the painful recollections called up in giving publicity to this history, might have been spared me.

"There is an adage which says that 'those who are born to be hanged will not be drowned.' I narrowly escaped the former, and, regarding the latter, I have so often nearly realized being so, that I begin to think the above aphorism has no bearing on my case."

We cannot conclude our notice of this work without denouncing in the strongest terms the

* Strange as it may seem to us in this moist hemisphere, it is no less true that in New South Wales, they had not a drop of rain at one time during the space of fourteen months, when hay, plentiful as it generally is in that climate compared with the consumption, rose in the Sydney Market to the enormous price of twenty-five dollars a ton.