

Recent Fiction.*

QUITE a charming story of American life is the first on our list. "The Wise Woman," though not the heroine, is a delightful character and she dominates the whole book. The first scene and a number of subsequent ones are laid at a seaside resort, Pokonet, but it largely pictures the life of the upper class in a suburban part of New York. The main characters, which are clearly and firmly drawn, not by description but by their own conversations, are Kitty Ormond, a bright, loveable girl, her sister Madeleine, pretty but vain, and inclined to think that her mother, brother and sister exist for her benefit alone; Fritz and Marguerite Sheldon who are rising from a lower social circle and who keep house together; and the wise woman herself, an old friend of the Ormond family, who takes up the Sheldons on discovering their worth in true fairy god-mother style. The way she brings them into the most fashionable society of the place is capitally told. The story deals with the way Kate Ormond and Fritz Sheldon are drawn to each other, much to Mrs. Ormond's indignation, for she considers Fritz no match for any of her family. In her case there is a satire after the manner of Thackeray on the social views of many American mothers. Marguerite and the nephew of the Wise Woman fall in love and it is hinted that the pretty Madeleine will soon get over a disappointment. The book is perhaps spun out a little too long, but is nevertheless interesting and brightly written from start to finish.

"A White Umbrella" is a seaside idyll, dealing with a couple of weeks spent at an English seaside town, where a young widow with literary tastes and an impressionist artist have by chance been thrown together on a visit. Some of the word painting of the scenes is very well done and there are a couple of satirical descriptions of the impressionist style which will be enjoyed by any Philistines who have been puzzled by crude specimens of that class of work. (We must mention that the author squares himself with that school of artists in the end):—

She looked at the canvas on the easel. It was washed all over with various shades of grey, in a streaky way, preparatory, she supposed, to beginning a picture. "What is this going to be?" she hazarded.

"Oh, that's finished. I shall not be able to do any more to it. It's just a little sketch of the shore and sea."

She looked at it incredulously, and then glanced at him, wondering if it was a joke; but he looked quite serious. "Where's the fishing boat?" she asked, for the sake of saying something.

"It wasn't there when I painted it. But I'll put it in," he said eagerly, and picking up his palette and brushes, without sitting down, he glanced at his canvas and then at the boat, which was now drawn on to the shore, and with his brush made a dab of a darker grey, with a few spots near it, in the middle of his canvas, and said "There!" much in the voice in which one says it to a child who has asked one to draw something.

"I believe," she said at last, "that impressionism is merely a thing of the imagination." ("Of course it is," he interpolated.) "A form of hysteria. You imagine you see all sorts of things on your canvas that really exist only in your own brain. I believe that y dint of telling me they were there and pointing them out, you would mesmerize me, so to speak, so that I should begin to see them to . . . What you are painting now conveys absolutely no meaning to me. It is quite as intelligible upside down as it is the right way up. But I have no doubt that if I gazed long enough, my imagination would supply a meaning."

We hardly think our former Governor-General has added to his reputation as a literary man by this work, "From Shadow to Sunlight." In future ages, if it were to be discovered after being lost, it could plausably be argued

* "The Wise Woman." By Clara Louise Burnham. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. 1895. Price \$1.25.

"A White Umbrella," and other stories. By the author of "Soul-shapes." Pseudonym Library. London: T. Fisher Unwin. Toronto: The Copp, Clark Co. 1895.

"From Shadow to Sunlight." By the Marquis of Lorne. The Acme Library. Westminster: A Constable & Co. 1895.

"Sir Quixote of the Moors" By John Buchan. New York: Henry Holt & Co. Buckram Series. 1895.

"The Despotie Lady." By W. E. Norris. Methuen's Colonial Library. London: Methuen & Co. Toronto: The Copp, Clark Co.

"The House of the Wolf." By Stanley Weyman. New Edition. Longman's Colonial Library. London: Longmans, Green & Co.

that several hands took part in its composition. It is broken in half, the first scene being laid in Scotland, the rest on the Pacific coast after an interval of some years. Moreover the heroine, an American girl, Mary Wincott, is at first usually spoken of as "Miss Mary," but when we become on more familiar terms, the author names her boldly "Mary" without the prefix. The pruning knife might have been applied throughout with advantage, and the style at times is rather pedantic and aggravating. The tale centres on a man who alienated his friends by becoming a Jesuit, and then excited the hostility of this body by recanting without letting his former friends know he had done so.

"Sir Quixote of the Moors," one of the nicely bound Buckram series, is thrown into the shape of a narrative, written by a Frenchman, the Sieur de Rohaine, concerning some early adventures of his in Scotland during the time the Covenanters were being persecuted after the Restoration. He is supposed to be placed in a delicate situation, being left in charge of a house and a girl engaged to a man who had shown him great kindness, while this man goes into hiding with the girl's father to escape certain imprisonment and probable death. After a time these two fall in love. The denouement is well told and the interest in the story is sustained throughout.

We can safely recommend "The Despotie Lady and Other Stories" as a thoroughly enjoyable book. Some of them have already appeared in magazines. All of them are very readable and several extremely amusing, especially "A Three-Bottle Comedy," in which three bottles of various sorts of medicine lose their owners and get mixed up before being restored. The first story is the best, however. Eric Langdale falls in love with Miss Maunsell, whose mother objects to him, and his second interview with them is as follows:—

Lady Maunsell responded to his salutation by a blood-curdling stare. "How do you do?" said the redoubtable lady at length in her deep voice. "Who are you?" Eric seated himself at her elbow and smilingly reminded her that he had the very great pleasure of meeting her, not long since, at a concert. "Oh!" she returned shortly. "Yes; I think I remember. A poet, are you not?"

"I am not sure that I ought to have the audacity to call myself so," the young man replied; "but I certainly have written a few rhymes. I hope you don't dislike poetry." "I dislike poets," Lady Maunsell declared. "Poets are, as a rule, idle, irreligious and licentious."

"Oh, but not quite all of them!" pleaded Eric. "There was Milton, you know." "I presume that you are not Milton." (Here Lady Maunsell suggests that he turn his attention to hymns, Eric catches Bertha's eyes, sees her smile, and cannot help a laugh.)

"Well, Mr. —, I didn't quite catch your name——." "Langdale," said Eric indistinctly, still struggling with his untimely merriment. "Longtail. Well, Mr. Longtail, you have not yet told us what it is you want." "I—I don't want anything," answered Eric, sobered and dismayed; "I only looked in for the pleasure of—er—renewing acquaintance with you."

Eric promptly gets his dismissal for the time, but his companion, Peter Garnett, fares better by retaliating on the lady when introduced later on by Eric at Wiesbaden, whither Mr. Garnett and Lady Maunsell have both repaired for treatment:

"I'm taking care of a friend of mine who suffers from gout," Eric explained with suspicious haste. "May I introduce him?" Peter took off his hat and Lady Maunsell remarked sternly: "You are a young man to have been attacked by gout. But I dare say you have brought it on yourself." "Thank you, same to you!" answered Peter with prompt asperity. "I have no doubt that we should both have been better if we had exercised more prudence; but that isn't a thought that will bear dwelling upon." "We can never," said Lady Maunsell, "dwell too much or too long upon thoughts which may lead us to repent of past follies. I speak of you, not of myself; for I have touched neither wine nor spirits for many years past." "Ah, well; I have," said Peter; "I have touched them in moderation, and I shall probably continue to touch them—likewise in moderation—until the end of the chapter. Especially since you are such a discouraging example of the results of total abstinence. To be sure eating too much is quite as likely to bring on gout as drinking too much. Perhaps you habitually overeat yourself."

The interviews between Eric's father and Lady Maunsell are also very well done and the idea which forms the plot of the story is far from commonplace.

"The House of the Wolf" is one of Stanley Weyman's best stories. Though by no means equal to the "The Gentleman of France," is still very well worth being published in this cheaper and well printed edition. It first appeared in 1890, went through several editions, and in 1894 alone was reprinted five times. The description of Paris during the massacre of St. Bartholomew makes one thankful not to have been present in person on that occasion.