

Occasional Papers.

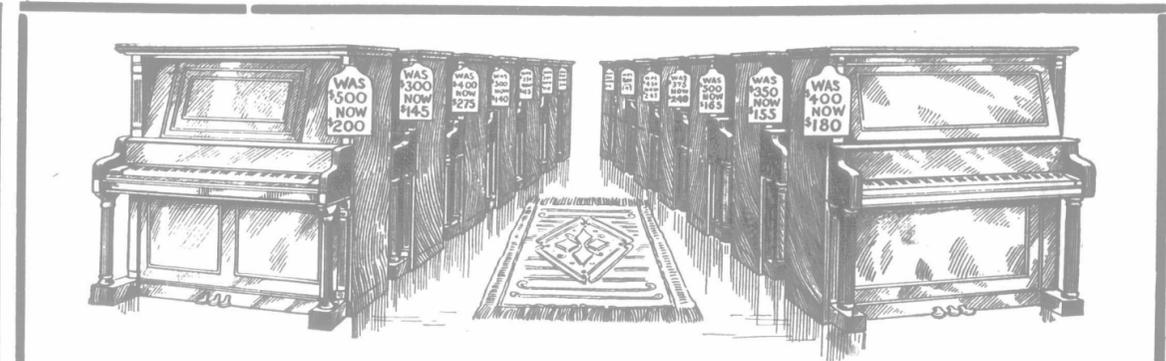
SOME CHARACTER SKETCHES.
No. 1.

We are sometimes asked to recommend books suitable either for one's own personal enjoyment or for reading aloud at social gatherings, but there is such a wide difference in people's tastes, especially as regards fiction, that one is inclined to hesitate before committing oneself to a very specific opinion. Then, one's enjoyment of a book often depends upon one's mood. To-day we may enjoy keenly what to-morrow might fall flat; to-day we may be responsive to wit and humor, to-morrow either may jar upon our nerves and nought but sentimental and pathos please us. Some like comedy; some prefer tragedy; some insist upon a purpose running as a thread through every page; some just want a story, grave or gay, without any hidden teaching whatever.

However, for pathos, humor and a good deal of charming character sketching, I think I may safely recommend the writings of Mary E. Wilkins, especially her earlier ones.

The series of which I am now more particularly alluding can be asked for at the libraries under the title of its first story, "A New England Nun." True, they are tales from over the border, and some may say: "Oh! American, of course. We are flooded with American literature. Why cannot we keep to the literature of the British Empire, and, pray, are there no people worth writing about in the country villages of our own land?" etc., etc. To these, I would reply: "Yes, most certainly there are, and perhaps the reading of this delightful little volume may serve as an inspiration to some Canadian writer to search them out and then to tell us about them. Meanwhile let us enjoy and profit by the vivid word pictures given by Mary E. Wilkins. The volume I have by my side has no illustrations, and yet, as one by one she introduces her heroines, for they are mostly women, amidst the simple surroundings in which their homely lives are spent, we can see the hills and the valleys, the running streams, the raspberry patches, the yellow corn, the gaudy hollyhocks and the sunflowers. We can hear the buzz of the bees, the cackling of the hens, the twittering of the birds, and we can almost smell the roses and mignonette which are growing beneath the windows of the cottages. These are the settings in which Miss Wilkins introduces Louisa Ellis, her New England nun.

"It was late in the afternoon, and the light was waning. There was a difference in the look of the tree shadows out in the yard. Somewhere in the distance, the cows were lowing and a little bell was tinkling. Now and then, a farm wagon tilted by, and the dust flew; some blue-shirted laborers with shovels over their shoulders plodded past; little swarms of flies were dancing up and down before the people's faces in the soft air—a gentle stir over everything, a very premonition of rest and hush and night." Louisa, who has been peacefully sewing at her sitting-room window, quilts her needle into her work, folds it precisely, and lays it in a basket with her thimble, thread and scissors, for Louisa has done "just so" for years, and can never remember having "mis-laid one of these little feminine appliances, which had become, from long use and constant association, a very part of her personality." Louisa ties a green apron round her waist, gets out a flat straw hat with a green ribbon, and, fetching a little blue crockery bowl, goes out into the garden to pick some currants for her tea. Then follows the description of the little square table, in exactly the center of the kitchen, the damask napkin on the tray, the silver cream-pitcher, the china sugar-bowl, and the one pink china cup and saucer, the plate



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KARN—7½-octave upright piano, by D. W. Karn & Co., Woodstock, in rosewood case with polished panels and raised carvings in relief, has heavily flanged, full iron frame, trichord overstrung scale, copper strings in bass section, and Wessel, Nickel & Gross action. Originally \$350. Now..... **\$210**

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EMERSON—7½-octave upright piano, by the Emerson Piano Co., Boston, in handsome burl walnut case of Colonial design, with Boston fall-board and full length polished panel surmounted by hand-carving; has 3 pedals in addition to muffer. Has been used but very little, and could not be told from new. A splendid piano. Regularly \$425. Now..... **\$280**

KNABE—7½-octave upright grand piano, by the Wm. Knabe Co., Baltimore, in rich rosewood case with polished panel and raised hand-carving. A remarkably fine piano and a bargain we rarely have to offer. Originally \$650. Now..... **\$295**

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of little cakes, and the leaf or two of lettuce, of all of which Louisa partakes daintily. Indeed, she "eats heartily, though in a delicate, picking way," so that it seems surprising that any considerable bulk of food should vanish at all.
Louisa goes out of doors to feed the dog, picking up, by the way, any stray bits she may have dropped when carrying scraps to the hen-coop; washes her tea things, her china and teaspoons, and, as the twilight had deepened into dark, she lights her lamp, takes up her sewing once more, and awaits the arrival of Joe Dagget, to whom, after a fifteen-years engagement, and a fourteen-

years absence, from which he has returned with a well-earned competency, she is to be married in a month. Honest Joe had kept to his purpose steadfastly during those fourteen years of absence, and he had come home now to marry the woman who had been patiently and unquestioningly waiting for him. He would have stayed fifty years, had it taken so long to make that little fortune, and come home feeble and tottering, or never come home at all, to marry Louisa." Then, we are told that in that length of time much had hapened to Louisa's home, leaving her to the prim, solitary, self-contained life which had

now become her second nature, and to break away from which would be a positive upheaval. Upon the somewhat sudden and unexpected return of the man she had promised to marry some day, a some-day which had become so in'angible, "so far in the future, that it was almost equal to placing it over the boundaries of another life, Louisa's first emotion was consternation, although she would not admit it to herself, nor did Joe dream of it." Both meant to be faithful to their early vows. Neither had for those fourteen years even thought of marrying anyone else.
The description of one of Joe's

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