

AMONG OUR BOOKS.



THAT the bluestocking bug-a-boo yet lingers in the conception of some is made evident by an amusing incident which occurred recently in the experience of the writer while staying at a large hotel in — well, it doesn't really matter which of our Canadian cities.

On entering the dining-hall one morning, the writer paused at a table to speak a few words to a new arrival, — a woman remarkable for her mass of beautiful hair, which exists in perpetual disarrangement—then proceeded to her own seat. Presently a second guest of the house leaned over her shoulder and whispered:

"Who is the lady to whom you spoke just now?"

"That is the writer of —" was the answer. "She comes of a well-known literary family and is a clever journalist."

"Oh!" answered the lady, in a tone irresistibly funny in its serious satisfaction. "I thought she was something of that kind because of her hair."

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One of the new books that comes to us this month is "Stephen, a Soldier of the Cross," by Florence M. Kingsley. "Stephen" is a sequel to "Titus," and both are well worth the reading.

It is always a question with many,—especially those who hold the Bible to be verbally inspired,—in how far it is permissible to imaginatively connect the incidents and fill in the ellipses, with the purpose of bringing those wonderful three years of Christ-life more vividly before the modern thought of the twentieth century.

Again, to the deeply imaginative mind, the Bible narrative, as it stands, is so picturesque, so potent, a fragment so mightily dramatic, that to piece it with our own futilities were as unfilling as to set the diamond in clay.

Yet the Christian world has moved a long way from orientalism in these nineteen centuries; and any tale that, while touching reverently the words and deeds of Christ, in no wise adding to or maltreating them, shall yet in simple natural manner render more familiar to us the times and manners,—nay, even that shall make more real the people who came in touch with Him,—may prove both entertaining and profitable.

Only, it is well to draw distinction between two classes of such writings.

There are tales that are written for dramatic effect only;—that, like the "Ecce Homo," add to the agony, pile up the tears and the suffering, dwell upon the purple tortures, lead the thought a-riot in sensuous passion of pain, and cry 'Behold!'

The second class are written for our reverent learning, and, like that wonderful painting by Gilbert Max, "The Raising of Jairus'

Daughter," represent the Master to us as one infinitely thoughtful, calmly beautiful in tenderness and help.

It is hardly necessary to state which of these are to be commended.

"Titus" and "Stephen" are of the latter class. They send their readers to the Bible instead of taking its place; which, after all, is, perhaps, the supreme test. These stories have the charm of building for us a very sweet character about which the Bible tells us all too little.

In the earlier book *Stephen* appears as a deformed child, who is healed by Christ. In the latter, he has grown to young manhood, and works with the Apostles,—a second John in gentleness and purity.

Historically, "Stephen" deals with the days immediately following the Crucifixion, the very earliest gathering of the bereft and sore-hearted handful of followers, and the persecutions that they endured from the priests.

From a literary point of view, the charm of the book lies largely in that it follows



FLORENCE M. KINGSLEY.

closely on Scriptural lines in all dialogue; that the narrative is set forth in simplest Saxon, and that the atmosphere is clear, the colouring well toned.

The adventures of the two orphan children form an innocent yet effective connecting thread throughout the pretty tale.

"Stephen, A Soldier of the Cross," by Miss Florence Kingsley. Wm. Briggs, Toronto.

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A attractive volume of short stories comes to us from the pen of a new Canadian writer, F. Clifford Smith. That these are chiefly tales whose scenes are laid in our new land, adds naturally to their interest for us.

With E. W. Thomson's finished and dramatic sketches and the romantic vigour of Gilbert Parker as our present high standards of Canadian colouring, it is difficult to deal with any book of similar method and purpose without making unfair comparison. Yet, in the present instance the author, while not yet reaching the master art of these men, touches it very nearly.

"A Lover in Homespun,"—the volume is so named from the initial story,—is a bright and entertaining book, each of whose dozen tales are most readable, while several of them, notably "Le Loup Garou," "The Faith that Removes Mountains," and "A

Prairie Episode," are equal to the best work of the writers whom we have mentioned.

The author deals largely with French-Canadian life, its simple domesticities and beliefs. "A Lover in Homespun" is a simple French-Canadian love story, very prettily told.

In "Le Loup Garou," one of the strongest and most touching tales in the volume, the author founds his sketch upon the strange superstition which yet lingers largely among the French habitant,—that if seven years pass without confession the Church forsakes the neglectful one, and he is seized upon by the devil, who changes him into the dreadful loup garou. But if it is possible to draw blood from the beast, the victim will be released from the curse and restored to manhood again.

The scene where a dear old mother kills a great baying hound in belief that she was redeeming her wayward son is worth quoting:

"See, Baptiste," she said, standing erect and pointing to the dog; "the curse has fallen as I feared it would. The devil has turned our Pierre into a hound and the beast is coming this way."...

She made a weird picture as she stood in the open poor, with her thin, white hair streaming about her face, and grasping the knife which glittered in the moonlight.

The huge animal was now only a field away. Separating the field from the road was a stone wall.

She ran and crouched behind the portion of the wall over which the animal must jump.

She sprang to her feet just as the dog rose into the air. She was exactly in front of it. The beast uttered a howl of terror as the strange apparition so unexpectedly rose up before it. Bravely she seized with her left hand one of the paws of the animal, and, as it fell, the knife in her right hand was buried deep in the shoulder of the dog. The enraged animal turned and buried its teeth in her arm. She did not feel the bite; the crisis had passed—the unnatural strength deserted her.

Just as unconsciousness was dimming her eyes she saw a man towering above her. A voice that she knew and loved so well called "Mother, mother." She opened her eyes wearily and looked into the face of the man, and a smile passed over her face.

"My Pierre, my son," she murmured; "I said I would release you." Her lips grew very white and her head fell back upon his shoulder.

"A Prairie Episode" is a tale of the Northwest worthy of Bret Harte. Several sketches deal vividly with scenes and incidents in the building of the C. P. R. across the great stretch of prairie; and with the life of the railway men and train despatchers during the early days of its operation.

There is not a poor story in the book; all are readable, and several touch high dramatic work.

Canada has another writer to be proud of.

"A Lover in Homespun," by F. Clifford Smith. Wm. Briggs, Toronto.

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One of the most earnest discussions that took place during the recent conference of the National Council of Women was upon the topic of how best to teach needful physiological facts to children and young people, and in connection with the subject a number of books were recommended by one and another of the members of the Council.

These recommendations were personal, and therefore of value to all mothers, who are often sorely puzzled how to deal with the questionings of young people in the manner that is at once both wise and sweet and uplifting.

"A Song of Life," by Miss M. Morley, McClure Pub. Co., Chicago, was spoken of as one of the best in its purity and beauty of thought.

"A Mother's Advice," "A Father's Advice," by E. P. Miller.

"Schoolboy Morality," by Elliot Stock. Paternoster Row.

"Mother's Talk with the Children," a series issued by W. C. T. U., Chicago.

REVIEWER.