

Two Notable Novels.*

FOREIGN literature, and particularly the foreign novel, is receiving a great deal of attention from English readers. Deservedly, too, for when we think of the writers who have impressed and are impressing themselves upon the age, we think not so much of English authors as of Tolstoi, of Ibsen, of Zola. Now that Maurus Jokai's works are being done into English by Mr. R. Nisbet Bain we will soon have to add his name to those permanently influencing our literature. His "Eyes Like the Sea" was a somewhat disappointing book, as it lacked balance, was too subjective, and dealt with life which it is hard for us to understand and with which we cannot sympathize. But "Midst the Wild Carpathians" is a romance that will compel every reader to finish it. There is not a dry chapter in it. It is not an easy matter to write interesting historical novels, but Jokai has succeeded. The scene of the story is laid in the mountains of seventeenth century Transylvania. The time and the environment give Jokai an opportunity of introducing many diverse characters; and his pages are crowded with "superb Turks," nobles, and peasants, and all are drawn with wonderful truth and interest. It has been said that "the whole history of Transylvania reads like a chapter from the Arabian Nights." This book would certainly lead us to think that this was true. No great modern novelist has succeeded in giving us so much of that romantic coloring that is the charm of the Arabian Nights as has Jokai. Adventure is piled on adventure, incident upon incident, glowing description upon glowing description, until we forget all about the fact that we are reading an historical romance and think ourselves in dream-land. But he deals with the facts of the history of Transylvania, and the names of Kemeny, of Apafi, of Teleki are at any rate historical names. While these characters are well drawn they are only one of the interests of the book. The marvellous drawing of Azrael's abode in the Devil's Garden, the entrancing description of Corsar's Beg's gorgeous palace are done with a powerful pen. Perhaps the strongest chapters in the book are the first and second. The first gives a description of a hunt through the primeval forest, of adventures with stags and boars; the second is a home scene, where a noble woman, Dame Apafi, is slaving to ransom her imprisoned husband. Anna is the noblest character in the book, and the wisest. It would be impossible to say anything better of her than that she is "like one of Shakespeare's women." Among Jokai's most striking traits is his humor. He bubbles over with a fine mirth. It first appears when Kucsuk Pasha, a character not unlike, and as noble as Scott's Saladin in the Talisman—raises Michael Apafi, a good-natured, kindly, stupid country squire to the throne of Transylvania, and it bursts out at intervals all through the book.

The novel has many blemishes. It is lacking in story interest, although the striking incidents and situations make us forget that. It is hard to understand what part the first chapter plays in the book. It would almost seem that Jokai had written the description of a hunt in which historical characters took part, and thought it so good that he tagged it on to his historical romance. Although all his characters are drawn with wonderful distinctness too many are created only to vanish, and the reader is left dissatisfied. But we must expect inconsistencies, crowding, defects, from a man whose imagination is so teeming that he had created no less than a hundred and fifty novels.

Turning from Jokai's powerful romances and opening George Meredith's "The Adventures of Harry Richmond," now published in the cheap and convenient Colonial Library, we are confronted with very different matter set down in a very different manner. George Meredith will ever be a poser for the critic. His language is at times so startlingly strange—especially in his "Lord Ormont and His Aminta"—that we are compelled to wonder whether he should be entitled to a place among the writers of pure English; but his expressions, although often unique, original, and startling, have

great force, and in a single word he succeeds in giving us what would call forth a sentence from a less highly gifted writer. His ideas, too, seem to crowd each other, so much so that the reader will sometimes plunge along for pages vaguely wondering what it is all about. And yet he fascinates, and it is impossible to throw aside the novel without seeing the end of the adventures. At the same time "the adventures" are not startlingly interesting, the situations are not extraordinary powerful—unless the extraordinarily improbable be deemed the extraordinarily powerful. If this is true, if it is likewise true that the language and style are somewhat wearing, wherein does the charm of the book lie? It lies in the authors power of making his characters live. The titular hero is Harry Richmond, but the real hero—if such he can be called—is his father "plain Augustus Fitz-George Roy Richmond." The reader is disappointed in Harry: he does not make proper use of his opportunities, something is constantly expected from him, but nothing follows. But the father with his buoyant hopefulness, his marvellous power of gulling people, his plausible tongue, and persuasive manners is a character not to be soon forgotten, and at the close of the novel the reader finds himself filled with something like admiration for this adventurous ne'er do weel. Other characters, although not so striking, are equally well done. Mrs. Waddy and the Squire are like bits out of Dickens. The princes, the lords, the farmers, the gipsies—for all appear on this multitudinous page—fix themselves on the mind, and George Meredith leaves the impression that he is an intellectual force with a knowledge of humanity that well fits him for a leading place among the novelists of this prolific age.

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BRIEFER NOTICES.

Motley: Verse Grave and Gray. By J. W. Bengough. Illustrated. (Toronto: William Briggs. Price \$1.00. 1895.)—So far as the critics of THE WEEK are concerned, there was no reason for any attempt to disarm them by the conciliatory dedication which Mr. Bengough prefixes to his very pretty and acceptable volume: "To the Critics, with assurances of the profoundest respect and admiration." The author is known to all Canadians as a patriotic man, who loves his fellow men and serves them "if not wisely" always, yet very well, as a talented humorist, and as a caricaturist of a very high order. The verses consist of three divisions in the table of contents, the humorous, the serious and pathetic, and the elegiac (we direct the printer's attention to the last word in his table); but in the book these three classes of poems are mingled together, not quite advantageously in the judgment of the present writer. It is rather a shock to pass from broad farce to elegy and back again. This, however, is a mere detail, and we have read the collection with much interest, pleasure and sympathy. Some of the verses in memory of departed citizens of Toronto are sincere, deep, and touching, and will be valued not only by the friends and relatives of the commemorated, but by many of their fellow citizens. Mr. Bengough is Catholic in his sympathies, commemorating Archbishop Lynch, Dr. Stafford, Sir John Macdonald, Mr. George Brown, and Sir John Thompson alike. The elegiac poems are generally accompanied by excellent miniature photographs. It is difficult to quote; but we will give the last poem in the volume:

EPILOGUE.

"Motley: Verses Grave and Gray,"
Finis—put the book away.
Nothing learned, nothing deep,
Perhaps you say;
True—but you've not been asleep
Anyway!
Sombre lines and trifles, too;
Verses light and verse blue,
Very true;
And since you have read them through—
Verses of a motley hue—
Now, can you
Snug ensconced in easy chair,
Quote us as your judgment fair,
In this regard
From Avon's bard
"Motley is the only wear?"

* "Midst the Wild Carpathians." By Murus Jokai (London: George Bell & Sons. Toronto: The Copp, Clark Co.)

"The Adventures of Harry Richmond." By George Meredith. (London: George Bell & Sons. Toronto: The Copp, Clark Co.)