

Book Reviews.

SENTIMENTAL TOMMY.

As we pick up "Sentimental Tommy,"—could Mr. Barrie have chosen a less euphonious title for his book?—we naturally revert in thought to "Clog Kelly," Crockett's story of an Edinburgh street arab.

It takes us some time to journey through the five hundred pages of Tommy's adventures and mental twists; but when at last we lay the book down, it is with a decided feeling of preference for Crockett's sturdy young hero.

Clog Kelly we can understand, and admire. He was a hearty out-and-out little vagabond, with primitive ideas of justice, and prompt boyish methods of achieving the same. If he received kindness, in his own crude way he returned the same; if, as more often occurred, rough treatment was measured out to him, he felt in duty bound to "get even," and he it said to his credit, and that of the author's—Clog Kelly usually "got even" in a mischievous, straightforward street arab fashion, that in itself was indication of the boy's sturdy character and honesty.

But this boy, Sentimental Tommy, with his curious mental double vision, who "kenned a wy" to accomplish whatever he desired, who found it easy to believe anything he chose; this boy, hysterical, emotional, devious, is not to our taste; and we find ourselves acknowledging his good points reluctantly.

But Mr. Barrie's genius appears in that we recognize the boy as a type. Indeed, we catch an unpleasant glimpse of ourselves in him, which may account for our repugnance. The facile sympathy, the crooked trick, the evasive speech, and surface emotion, which offset the finer qualities of keen imagination, quick wit, and tender heart, are sufficiently our own to account for our distaste of the type.

Only once or twice does Tommy win our entire regard; where he goes off with Grizel, for instance, because, as he explained, "it wouldna have been respectable for her to go by herself;" and again where he lost the essay scholarship through determination to find the exact word that would express an idea.

He had wanted a Scotch word that would signify how many people were in church, and it was on the tip of his tongue, but would come no farther. * * * The hour had just gone by like winking; he had forgotten all about time in searching for the word.

Pucklo, manzy, curran, slow,—each of these in turn were afterwards suggested by his wrathful schoolmaster; but none of them expressed the exact idea in Tommy's mind, and finally he was dismissed in disgrace from the presence of the ministers and mortified dominie.

As they were preparing to leave the school, the door opened a little and there appeared in the aperture the face of Tommy, tear stained but excited. "I know the word, now," he cried "it came to me at once: it is hantle."

"O, the sumph!" exclaimed Mr. Lachlan McLauchlan, "as if it mattered

what the word is, now!" And said Mr. Doshart "Cathro, you had better tell Aaron Latta (Tommy's guardian) that the sooner he sends this nincompoop to herding, the better."

But Mr. Ogilvy, * * * said in an ecstasy to himself, "He had to think of it till he got it—and he got it. The laddie is a genius!" They were about to tear up Tommy's unfinished essay, but he snatched it from them, and put it in his pocket.

"I am a collector of curiosities," he explained "and this paper may be worth money yet."

"Well," said Cathro savagely, "I have one satisfaction, I ran him out of my school."

"Who knows," replied Mr. Ogilvy, "but what you may be proud to dust a chair for him when he comes back."

In spite of our instinctive dislike to Tommy we recognize the artist in him. Clog Kelly had no such possibilities; we expected nothing of him but the attainment of a certain primitive, yet healthy standard of manliness which he reached.

In our last vision of Clog, he "likes to go barefoot about the garden, still," and his platform speech at the club, which his own money built, was "mind, you chaps, if I hear o' ony yin o' ye making a disturbance, or as muckle as spittin' on the floor,—weel, ye ken me."

Tommy, on the contrary, plans, wriggles, evades questions, and twists himself generally inside out, until the last moment of our acquaintance with him. Yet as we close the book, we are fain to cry with his exasperated dominie, "I would give a pound note to know what you'll be ten years from now."

As Mr. Barrie evidently means that we shall know, we might as well get our pound notes ready.

In the meantime, it would make an admirable subject for debate, as to which qualities in Sentimental Tommy the boy, will triumph in Tom Sandys the man, and what may be reasonably expected of the latter.

* * *

In discussing the hero of the book, and our personal feeling toward him,—which is certainly not the reviewer's especial task, we have made no reference to the literary value of the tale.

Sentimental Tommy is Mr. Barrie's most ambitious attempt in novel writing. As a novel it is most entertaining, and as a study of child life, the book is markedly clever. Tommy's child days in London, the tracking of his infantile thoughts and experiences, is a work of genius. For none but a man of exceptional gift could thus turn back the years and live in chaotic baby years again; drawing forth out of the vagueness the connected narrative of the inner life of a little ignorant child.

Woven about this innocent life is the tragedy of struggling adult years—could anything be more pathetic in its weakness and pride than the story of Jean Mylen, and her letters to her woman rival in Thrums.

"My dear Esther—I send you these few scraps to let you see I have not forgot you, though my way is now grand by yours. A spleet now black silk, Esther, being the second in a twelvemonth, as I'm a living woman. The other is no none tashed yet, but my gudeman fair insisted on buying a new one * * * When you are waxing ower your kail-pot in a

plot of heat, just picture me ringing the bell for my servant, and saying with a wave of my hand, 'servant, lay the dinner.'"

And the writer penned the letter from a miserable garrot, with a hacking cough punctuating each word, while her children lacked food.

Poor fooling, of a truth, but so human!

* * *

The strange tragedy of Aaron Latta's life, revealed so tersely but effectively; Jean Myles' death; the children's return to Thrums; their life there; the introduction of Grizel and the Painted Lady; the pretty Cranford character, Alison Craig, with her elder-maidenly romance; Tommy's Jacobite rising; Grizel's good fortune; little Elspeth's sisterly devotion—these are strains that weave themselves into the texture of Tommy's boy life; and the hand of the gifted author is plainly evidenced in the skill of the weaving. Mr. Barrie knows human nature, and especially woman nature so well that we are almost disposed to hide from him. Yet 'tis a charming novel, and to be most heartily commended to women.

REVIEWER.

"Sentimental Tommy," by J. M. Barrie. Toronto: Copp, Clark Company.

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