

## A SENIOR HENTY BOOK.\*

This is a stirring book. Incident crowds on incident; scarcely a chapter fails to rival Henty in a hair-breadth escape of hero or heroine from some awful danger and in chapter 26, a climax, there are four incidents any of which is good enough to make into a chapter. The gentle reader who is fond of a story of adventure and love will find the "Span O'Life" much to his taste, and will thank its authors, McLennan and McIlwraith, for so readable a book.

The story is constructed in a somewhat unusual fashion. It is the regulation thing for an historical romance to be told by the hero, but in the "Span O'Life," hero and heroine both find occupation in the pastime of narrative. Hugh Maxwell, of Kirkconnell, Jacobite refugee and subsequently French officer in Canada, tells the story for eleven chapters. Margaret Nairn, or Mme. de St. Just, carries on the narrative to chapter twenty-five. Then the hero resumes the narrative to the happy denouement, and a brief epilogue is the formal conclusion. Needless to say this is a method fraught with difficulties, involving delicacies of literary skill and character delineation that might make even the boldest hold his breath. Our authors cannot be congratulated on having surmounted these difficulties with any brilliant success.

Being a novel of incident, almost as completely as that demure piece of fiction, entitled, "Mr. Potter, of Texas," the book presents little, directly, in the way of characterization. In fact, the reader is so hurried along from event to event, that he has no time to stop and think about the people who are doing and daring so much. This lack of repose detracts seriously from the value of the story. For instance, in chapter twelve, the landing of Margaret and Lucy in Canada, their capture, and their meeting with the priest are set forth inside of five pages, with hardly a descriptive touch and all written in a very plain style. What an opportunity here for some skilful work in character study and in description! As a matter of fact, though you do know more clearly and vividly the life in Canada previous to the fall of Quebec, there is an almost complete lack of description, apparently owing to the pressure of incident upon the author's crowded columns.

Unfortunately, the "Span O'Life" suggests comparisons. Margaret's mission to find Hugh Maxwell recalls Evangeline's search, only to make us feel Longfellow's superiority. Here and there in the earlier part of the story, the hero indulges in some introspections. All lovers of Crockett know how frequent and how skilful these introspective remarks on the part of his heroes are, especially in the Raiders and the Red Axe. Hugh Maxwell suffers badly by comparison, both as to the quantity and the quality of his reflections. The siege of Quebec, Margaret's attempt as a spy, her meeting with Sarnnes at the ball, all suggest "The Seats of the Mighty." Harold Frederic has given us his

\* The "Span O'Life." A Tale of Louisbourg and Quebec. By William McLennan and I. N. McIlwraith. New York: Harper's. Toronto: Copp Clark.