

## Contributions.

### A MODERN NOVEL.

The output of novels becomes greater day by day and year by year, yet so low is the average standard that the believer in modernism has some ado to stifle the pessimistic cry that romance writing is a lost art and that the modern novel is non-existent. In the waste of hopelessly diseased and hopelessly insignificant books there are however strong and characteristic specimens enough to save the reputation of the age and represent it fairly in times to come. To say: this and this book will stand after our time, this and this will die, is to make statements which it is beyond our power to verify, and yet perhaps the believer in modernism may be forgiven if he cling to his belief that what has filled his want so completely in this age will not be "willingly let die" by those that succeed. There is one book which has stirred not a little controversy during the past year and which, living or dying in the next age, certainly deserves some tribute from this. That book is Mr. I. Zangwill's novel "The Master," (Harpers 1895).

It is one of Mr. Ruskin's canons that the artist who is to labour best in his art must depict his own times, and it is the faithful adherence to this principle that brings about changes of method and treatment—changes in some cases so radical that, as in this novel writing, the art is scarcely recognizable in its new form.

Elements that were counted indispensable in the older romances are wanting entirely in these of Mr. Zangwill's school, which have been spoken of slightly as "sketch book novels." The name is not inapt, for in this typical instance the book is made up of a series of pictures which show the figure of the hero in an almost infinite variety of circumstances. Minor figures change and disappear and later pages know them no more. The presence of the central one supplies the only principle of unity and as the series goes on, the character of this subject figure is revealed with wonderful clearness.

In the old romances one looked for mysteries, in this plotless narrative is none other than the mystery of life which is round every man's path. There are no wonderful coincidences, no miraculous keys to inconceivable dead locks. The responsibility of all this negation however is not so much with the novelist as it is with his impatient and unimaginative age. The stress and strain, the eager restlessness of modern life are in the rapidly shifting scenes of these pages. "To hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature" the modern writer must be forever on the move. Here also we find the intense realism which is characteristic of our time and with it an undeclared scepticism which is almost pathetic. There is no hint in Mr. Zangwill's story of an overruling Providence making all things work together to a desired end. There is simply presented the conjunction that we all know, man, even genius-dowered man, at war with circumstance and not seldom repulsed in the struggle. There is no attempt at solution of the old old puzzle of the limitation of man's powers. Only there is delineation of it all, both man and circumstance and in such picturing much is implied.

Mr. Zangwill's story follows the life journey of one Matthew Strang from his obscure childhood in Cobequid Village, Nova Scotia, through many toilsome wanderings, up to the pinnacle of earthly fame and beyond that deceitful point.

At every stage one finds the environment of the boy or man painted with marvellous vividness; and wrought in with the natural surroundings is many a human shape of strength or beauty to act upon the imaginative artist mind and help to mould it.

In the earlier chapters are Nova Scotia landscapes shown with a faithfulness to which native artists might be proud to attain. Here is the chill winter scenery carrying its peculiar air of stillness, deep snow muffling all footfalls and weighing down the branches of unrustling evergreens. Here again is the wonderful Bay of Fundy coast, the sea withdrawn, and in the