

Recent Fiction.*

RUSSIAN Nihilism, and intrigue have served as the theme of many modern stories. The latest of the kind to come to hand is "By Order of the Brotherhood," by Le Voleur. The scene opens in London, and then shifts about the continent with marvellous rapidity. Monte Carlo, Italy, Russia, are all visited, and exciting incidents, diabolical plots, hair-breadth escapes, crowd the pages. It is a "first work," and the author modestly dedicates it "to the British public," "to the six best men in the world," whom he names, and "to the late Miss," etc. The story is badly told, and is full of impossible situations. It is narrated by Archibald Clarke, a solicitor of the High Court of Justice, and by Brice, a detective; but the writer seems to have no power of entering dramatically into these characters, and if he did not inform us who was narrating we would never be able to tell from the style. The story is of that unhappy kind that invents difficulties, and invariably has the right individual on hand at the right moment to solve the difficulty, to fathom the mystery. No doubt the book will interest many readers. Irate fathers, detectives, gamblers, beautiful women, Russian nobles, nay, even the Czar himself, are introduced in such a way as to excite the curiosity of the reader of sensational stories; but for the student of the novel the crowding of incident, the shifting of the action, the absurdity of some of the situations, the lack of true psychology, will make it distasteful reading.

About such a book as "Neighbours of Ours," by Henry W. Nevinson, there will be a diversity of opinion among the critics. It is a piece of realism that out Zolas Zola in many ways. There is no pretence at a plot, and it is merely what the title professes, a study of the narrator's neighbours. The narrator is Jacko, a son of the London slums, who appears on the scene in "bust boots," "bust trousey-knees," and a collar, "as was nothing but a bit o' blue 'an'kerchief, through me bein' out o' work." Jacko knows the community he is describing, and keeps back nothing. The manners, the language, the life, are given in their utter nakedness, and we cannot help feeling that the book is a truthful drawing of a state of society that but few readers can ever reach or understand without an interpreter. We have in all ten chapters, dealing with ten different phases of life in the slums. Some of the sketches are broadly, coarsely humorous, while others have an ironical pathos that rivets the attention. "The St. George of Rochester" is perhaps the most poetic of these, and we cannot but like old Timmo, the winner of the Doggett Badge; but in singling it out from among the rest we feel that we are doing an injustice to such a powerful, Kipling-like study as "A Man of Genius," or the tenderly drawn story of "Little Scotty," and his grandmother, Mrs. Macrae, a woman with a propensity, "for keepin' 'erself clean," that was the amazement of all her neighbours. We cannot help wishing that a little of the strong language and such narratives as "Sissero's Return," and "Mrs. Simon's Baby," had been omitted, but then it is evidently the intention of Mr. Nevinson to give a full and complete drawing of the slums, and without this objectionable element we would have only a partial view. The personality of the narrator, Jacko, is not definite enough. He talks like a boy, but acts and thinks like a man; from the narrative it would be difficult even to estimate his age. But he has added to our knowledge of life, and despite the coarseness of some of the studies, and the lack of plot, we have read "Neighbours of Ours" with a great deal of interest.

On the title page of "Rhoda Roberts" by Harry Lindsay we have the following quotation, from the Proverbs of Solomon: "For the upright shall dwell in the land. . . . But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it." The story, which from this text promises to be a moral tale, is of a Welsh mining town. We have all the machinery usually adopted

to bring about the happy results foretold on the title-page. The genuine stage villain moves through the pages in the shape of the superintendent of Squire Trethyn's estates. He murders the squire, and succeeds in having the squire's son, Edward, arrested for the deed, but in the end the crime is brought home to his own door. Mr. Lindsay in his desire to paint a villain to serve as a contrast to the nobility of Edward's character has overdone his task. Grainger, the superintendent, is a badly-drawn devil, a man who could never have had self-control enough to attain a position of trust and power. The hero of the book is a milk-sop of the first water, ridiculously sensitive, absurdly honourable, and deplorably stupid. The heroine, Rhoda Roberts, is a marvellous compound: a girl who could kiss a young man good-night, allow him to talk of jealousy, to declare his love, to exchange vows with her, nay, even to permit of a "tender, clinging embrace," and yet who could afterwards declare that she had never intended him to think for one moment that her affection was other than sisterly. We could understand this in some girls, but not in Rhoda Roberts, as the author intends her to be his ideal of a noble, pure, Christian, womanly woman, who in the end is to receive the crown of the rewards, distributed in the closing chapters, when she becomes a missionary's wife and speeds to unregenerate Africa. The only character in the book with whom we find ourselves sympathizing is the profane drunkard, Rake Swinton. But even the drawing of poor Rake is spoiled by the author's over-sensitive piety. Rake is made to exclaim on his deathbed: "Where the dickens is Mr. Edward gone?" and then follows this explanation in parenthesis: "Dickens was not the word he used; it was a foul word, a revolting word, and one unfit for these pages." A note like this is mistaken morality; a reader cannot help supplying for himself a number of probable "cuss-words" that would doubtless shatter the nerves of Harry Lindsay. The characters in the story are largely from the labouring class, but at times talk like embryo philosophers and theologians. They occasionally lapse into a dialect, but the only distinguishing features it has are copious ellipses and bad English; the latter, indeed, is a fault that could be found on almost every page of the volume, when the author, and not his characters, is speaking. If the characters are badly done, the incidents are even more imperfectly worked. The hero escapes from prison, and returns to his native town completely disguised in a pair of coloured glasses, and thus adroitly escapes recognition, and when after many days his identity is discovered no attempt is made to rearrest him, and he calmly takes up his old life as though there were no such things as law and lawmakers and guardians in England. Too much has been said about this absurd book. Our wonder is how it could ever find a publisher. Let us hope that it saw the light of day at the author's expense. It is not, however, the author's first crime; would that it might be his last.

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Letters to the Editor.

THE CANADIAN FLAG.

SIR,—Prof. Wilson has told us that—"In times of national security, the feeling of patriotism among the masses is so quiescent that it seems hardly to exist"; and while it may be regretted that Canadians are not, generally, of a more demonstrative temperament—showing by words and actions their appreciation of all that affects the welfare of their native land—yet it is gratifying to know that they have at heart a love of country which is one of their sterling characteristics. The spirit of true patriotism is awakening; the people are exhibiting an interest in questions that relate to the common weal; they are beginning to feel a proper pride in the great country of their birth or adoption: compare the state of affairs twenty-five years ago with the glorious Dominion of to-day, and mark the blessed difference! Nothing has indicated this more clearly than the controversy on the subject of a new flag for Canada; an agitation that is national in its significance. The interest that our people have taken in the matter is evinced by the numerous letters to the press, and the various devices submitted for approval. Of the former, many have been instructive; of the latter, most of them are remarkable for their quaintness or

* "By Order of the Brotherhood." By Le Voleur. London: Macmillan & Co. Toronto: The Copp, Clark Co.

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"Rhoda Roberts." By Harry Lindsay. London: Chatto & Windus. Toronto: The Copp, Clark Co.