

NOVELS

There are some books which have all the airs and pretensions of full-grown novels but which merely treat of schoolboys and schoolgirls. *Ednor Whitlock*, by Hugh Maccol (Chatto and Windus, 8vo, pp. 342), is one of these. Ednor Whitlock is a young man who has to earn his livelihood as a schoolmaster. Ethel Whitlock, his sister, is a young woman who has to earn her livelihood as a teacher of English in a French school. Ednor Whitlock falls in love with a pupil at his sister's school, and rivets her affections by rescuing a boy from drowning. The compliments paid him by everybody occupy many pages. The author's idea of humour is shown by translating French literally, and his knowledge of the French language by giving the meaning of the occasional French sentences in which he now and then indulges. A good many pages are devoted to a mean German governess who listens at keyholes and marries a good French pastor, and a whole chapter is employed in the demolition of Mr. Darwin's theories, which, the writer tells us, is taken from an article of his own published some time ago. The book is absolutely uninteresting from beginning to end.

Bell Barry, by Richard Ashe King (Chatto and Windus, 8vo, 2 vols.), is a rambling story, which concerns itself at first with the adventures of a temperance lecturer, who goes about Ireland with magic-lantern illustrations of a gruesome nature and a lovely daughter. Later it becomes a detective narrative. Two young men, attracted by the daughter's charms, employ themselves in getting hired audiences to please the poor old father. The lectures over, in order to pass their time in Queens-town they visit a Cunard steamer just starting for New York. Before Bell and her swain can leave the vessel it starts for New York, and they are carried off. This is awkward enough, but it becomes more awkward when it turns out that "Mr. Reeve" is one "Stewart Rivers," who was tried for the murder of his wife and acquitted, though the judge charged heavily against him. The rest of the story is taken up with the investigations set on foot to clear him. He is a fine, handsome, gentlemanly man, and Bell is in love with him. So he is of course cleared at last, and the true murderer is discovered in the very man who would have been suspected by anybody but a detective in fiction. The voyage to New York and the cruelty with which the heroine is treated by the ladies on board are the most amusing parts of the book. As the young people were in love with each other it was a position of considerable delicacy.

It would be sad indeed to think how many of the male sex in fiction are kept out of their rights by cruel fate or still more cruel relations if we did not also know that there are quite as many of the female sex (in fiction also) pure-minded, noble, exquisitely beautiful, and entirely unworldly who detect their hidden merits and will assuredly lead them to the hymeneal altar at the end of the last volume. Mr. Daniel Dormer's *Steven Vigil* (Chapman and Hall, 8vo, 2 vols.) is the son of a rich man's daughter who ran away to marry a scoundrel. The rich man dies without forgiving her; she dies and leaves her son upon the world. He is taken up by an eccentric old woman, rich and worldly. He suffers through life in consequence of his likeness to his scoundrel father, and he is fired with an unfilial desire to "go for" that father and to "do for" him. Mr. Vigil, sen., is "wanted" for an audacious forgery. By way of concealment—a full description of his appearance being put out, and detectives everywhere looking for him—he takes a place as butler in a county family, and goes regularly and ostentatiously to church. His son happens to attend that church, and they recognise each other. The son gives the father chase. The father knocks the son down, and carries him back, stunned as he is, into the deserted church, where he is left for the night. During that night his whole beliefs are changed, and he is thus enabled to marry the beloved of his heart.

Mr. George Macdonald can always create creatures that are attractive, but he can seldom frame a story. In *There and Back* (Kegan Paul, Trübner, and Co., 8vo, 3 vols.) we have Mr. Macdonald's favourite young baronet, who also has the congenital defect which is as indispensable to Mr. Macdonald's heroes as the red hand of Ulster. On the present occasion our infant hero is only web-footed and web-fingered. Sir Wilton married a blacksmith's daughter, who died in giving birth to their first son. The second wife looks coldly on the boy, so his mother's sister, who has been acting as his nurse, carries him away, and she and her husband bring him up as their own son. All trace is lost of the boy, though the blacksmith lives close by the hall and shoes his son-in-law's horses. Richard becomes an expert book-binder, and is employed in his ancestral halls in restoring books' backs. Then he meets and falls in love with an Australian divinity, whose large-hearted mother amuses herself by going to church that she may lie in the gallery-pew reading yellow-backed French novels during the service. Barbara, who is charmingly painted, is a Christian after Mr. Macdonald's heart, and quite free from worldliness. But from the very beginning she knows that the young book-binder is the baronet's eldest son. The bookbinder also knows that she will be a great heiress, so between them these two unworldly beings plot and plan to bring about the same desirable alliance which wicked Lady Ann has devised for her own son, the reputed heir. Finally the old baronet recognises his eldest son's web-feet, and plays his lady-wife one last bad trick. His second son enjoys the property for a year after the old man's death. Then another will is read, and almost everything is taken from him and given to his half-brother. Richard's love for his handicraft and his tenderness for good old books is the prettiest feature in the story. Another is Barbara's devotion to her mare, and conviction that "Miss Brown" has a soul ("Like you and me, gentlemen," as Charles Kingsley said), which will live after death.

Save Me from My Friends (London: Longmans and Co., 8vo, pp. viii, 400) is the title chosen for his story by Mr. E. F. Knight, the author of "The Cruise of the Falcon." There is a proverb about knowing a man by his friends which leads us to infer that Ralph Anderson ought to have been saved from himself first and foremost. All his Norse blood, so much insisted on, does not keep him from displaying a most un-Norsemanlike and appalling simplicity. His only friends seem to be hypocrites or cads. Himself neither, he is made to appear both by the humourless series of scrapes he is led into. An air of complete unreality hangs around this story of the great-hearted but gullible undergraduate who lives and dies to justify the casual prediction of an Indian seer. The machinery of the tale is conventional; the style didactic without conveying a moral, the preface notwithstanding; stiff therefore, and increasing the general impression of crudity. Mr. Knight's better powers reappear, however, in a few touches of the sea; we wish there were more of them.

Bush Life in Australia and New Zealand, by Dugald Ferguson (London: Sonnenschein and Co., 8vo, pp. 327) is a simple story enough as far as the plot and the heart of the writer are concerned, but it is overlaid with details, like a diary written chiefly to be read, chewed, and digested by the writer at a later date, and the general reader grows weary before the three hundred and odd pages, tall and closely printed, have come to an end.

A story written to illustrate the theory that the Whitechapel murders were committed by an educated and (apart from his mania) a high-minded man who could not resist the murderous impulses which had been developed during his five years' residence in the interior of Africa could not be otherwise than disagreeable; and *Back to Africa*, by W. Westall (London: Ward and Downey, 8vo, pp. 160), is blighted by a purpose of the kind. The incidents are unpleasantly sensational, and the construction of the plot is not quite worthy of the author's reputation for skill in work of the kind.

A village beauty who attracts a wealthy lover, and by the charming freshness of her manner converts his passing fancy into love strong enough to make him wish to marry her, is the heroine of *A Wild Blossom*, by Jule Singleton (London: Griffith, Farran, and Co., 8vo, pp. 156). But the course of the young man's love did not run smooth; he is weak and not over-scrupulous to begin with, and the girl herself is very far from faultless, though she is much too severely punished. Her lover's worldly and clever sister interferes, and contrives to prevent his proposing to the "Wild Blossom" at a picnic arranged specially in her honour; but not content with depriving her of the lover who would have given her a great name and a position in the county, the author is cruel enough to allow the real hero of the story, a young man with whom she would have been happy, to be killed in a coach accident.

A collection of tales of Australian life by Australian ladies, edited by Mrs. Patchett Martin, under the title *Coo-ee* (8vo, pp. 318), has been published by Messrs. Griffith, Farran, and Co. There is much variety of style in the seven stories, and the most attractive of them are the least sensational. The editor's own contribution, "The Tragedy in a Studio," is far from being the best of them, but in several the English reader will be interested by

vivid descriptions of scenery, manners, and customs very different from those with which he is familiar. Mrs. Campbell Praed combines with a painful story of the death of a little girl an account of the Bunyip, the terror of the natives, a semi-human ghoul, or, as Mrs. Praed calls it, "the one respectable flesh-curdling horror of which Australia can boast."

The Eugene Arams and Lady Audleys who, after living in honour and comfort for many years, are suddenly confronted with the confederates or victims of their crimes, or by glaring evidence of them, are very familiar characters in modern fiction, and the heroine of *Dragon's Teeth*, by Clo Graves (London: Dalziel Bros., 8vo, pp. 292), is one of them. She robs an Englishman who has been drugged in a private gambling-house in Brussels, and escapes with her share of the spoil to England, where she marries a respectable country gentleman. The plot is complicated by the introduction of a neighbouring squire who secretly loves the lady; this young man had been, when a schoolboy, crippled for life by the youth who afterwards became her victim. The unfortunate squire has a servant who had been his nurse—an unscrupulous gipsy who is ready to poison anyone who stands in the way of her master's wishes. When at the end of twelve years the victim, still burning for revenge, comes on the scene, the plot thickens and the complications work themselves out in tragedy. The keenest appetite for sensational horrors will in fact be satisfied with the concluding chapters of "Dragon's Teeth."

The latest addition to the series of American tales by "Josiah Allen's Wife" (Marietta Holley), *My Wayward Partner* (London: Ward, Lock, and Co., 8vo, pp. 490), has a stronger element of pathos than most of its predecessors had. "Samantha," moreover, discusses serious subjects occasionally in a serious fashion, and the reader is now and then treated to pages of ordinary English, which come as a relief to the peculiar American dialect in which "Josiah Allen's Wife" generally describes her experiences.