

forth the human pathos of the engineer's life in its simplicity and self-sacrificing courage, which is of a piece with the manhood of his book. There are few narratives more telling than that modest account of an engineer's and a fireman's death, which he gives us in the "Death Run." It has the sincerity and simplicity of a report; but it is something better than a report.

The book furnishes some technical information to the profession and those versed in the professional terms. It also gives an estimate of the relation of the employee to the railroad, which, we need not add, is a manly and straightforward utterance. But, beyond these rather practical uses, it is a unique contribution to current literature. Its pages have the energy and the first-hand inspiration of good writing.

THE VILLAGE WATCH-TOWER. By Kate Douglas Wiggin. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. \$1.00.

Mrs. Wiggin adopts, more deliberately than heretofore, the manner of serious art in this volume addressed to grown-up readers. And a praiseworthy ambition is this—to quit for a time the condescension to the young person, which, knowing she can manage it with so much grace, Mrs. Wiggin is tempted to make her literary mission. Miss Alcott, too, was not always content to play the part of the good-natured aunt in literature. Yet, in the case at hand, the author has not strikingly justified her departure. These six sketches of New England life seem scarcely to sound a new note. Is that the fate of all belated travellers on the well-worn road of New England country fiction? There are no actual repetitions here of well-worn subjects; yet there is also no particularly novel point of view. "A Village Stradivarius" is the sketch which comes nearest to original power. Moreover, the contents of the present volume are not stories, they are sketches—preliminaries to the real achievement.

The charm of the book is, after all, the old charm which has won Mrs. Wiggin her well-deserved popularity; and that consists in her ease, her humour, and her sweet and wholesome sentiment, rather than in any stronger power. In these qualities it does not fall below the "lovely book," which the author wishes might have borne more

worthily her dedication to the "dear old apple-tree." After all, we have other authors to the front who will solve problems in dramatic construction and in difficult passion. We need not overrate the pretensions of this pleasant volume.

RED ROWANS. By Mrs. F. A. Steel. New York: Macmillan & Co. \$1.00.

Mrs. Steel's work will always command attention, not only for the artistic merits of its composition, but for the independence of its point of view. For, in spite of "art for art's sake," we read problem novels with a confessed interest in the problem *per se*. Perhaps it is the misfortune of our intellectualism, but Mr. George Meredith indulges us in our foibles as well as many another strong writer less unimpeachably an artist. After all, the literature of play-lovable as it is, and very desirable as an antidote for our seriousness—is out of step with the main march. It is not a literary period of pure humanism. And, fortunately for us, there are writers who can make the "problem" a legitimate motive in imaginative fiction. They do not palm off theories on us under a poor disguise of human drapery; they give us living human nature—human nature not distorted on any Procrustean bed of a point of view, yet somehow still so disposed of as to point the moral. And if that moral is irrevocably bound up in the vital passions of life, it rightfully belongs to art.

Two years ago Mrs. Steel's first book, *Miss Stuart's Legacy*, gained favourable comment from the press. It was a novel of English life in India, told with fine regard for the demands of striking and original action in the story and for characterisation, and also with much passion of purpose. The purpose has survived in the present novel. Told briefly in a quotation from the preceding novel, it runs: "Must love always be handfast to something else? Or was it possible for it to exist, not in the self-denying penance of propriety and duty, but absolutely free and content in itself? Why not?" In *Red Rowans* this theme is presented through English and Scottish character against a Scottish background, with less dramatic and picturesque effect than when it was set forth on Indian soil—there is very little action so called in *Red Rowans*—

yet with a firm control of the motive, which is worked out through strong and subtle contrasts of personality and the personal relation, and with a more ambitious dealing in the complexities of character.

Mrs. Steel's work has a masculine force which is shown not only in her independence of convention and the stock phrase, but in her almost virile appreciation of passion. It is an appreciation, however, which is bounded by an admirable self-restraint. Perhaps what one misses most in her book is the note of real gaiety; it has scarcely more than efforts at gaiety. There are very few women writers deeply in earnest, who can preserve their seriousness and at the same time the irresistible humour which, in a man's case, is quite consistent with his sense of the deepest tragedy or purpose. If there is any criticism to make on the technique of Mrs. Steel's book, we should say that it was needlessly diffuse, seeing that its plot is little relieved by palpable action. Otherwise it is a sound piece of workmanship; a criticism of the old relation between man and woman which deserves respect, and also a vivid picture of life—actual life, though chiefly from its subjective side.

AGAINST HUMAN NATURE. By Maria Louise Pool. New York: Harper & Bros. \$1.00.

There is a story told of two ugly men who engaged in a "making-face match." One of them contorted his countenance to a degree which the spectators believed to be unsurpassable; but when the second man "made a face," every one, with one consent, called out to him to "stay as God made him!" This exhortation might almost be taken as the text of Miss Pool's last novel, if it were not too true a bit of drawing to have a text, though the moral is certainly there for such as have eyes to discover it. The daughter of a Massachusetts Yankee and a Louisianian, brought up—no! we mistake!—*growing* up among the wild, free mountains of North Carolina, Temple Crawford believed that because her mother's married life had been unhappy, it was the sheerest madness for any one to marry for love. Far better to begin with mutual esteem and affectionate friendship,

since one must, in any case, end with these. As for herself, she is, she says, of a cold temperament, and incapable of love; therefore when she "experiences religion" under the preaching of the young evangelist, Richard Mercer, she quite believes that only religion has happened to her and not love, in the smallest degree. Of course not! This is only a hint of the *motif* of the story; to attempt a bald outline of the sequence of events would be to do the book an injustice. In fact, it is such a spontaneous sort of thing as to be almost unjust to itself; there are no marks of construction apparent, but things "just happen." It is only by remembering Miss Pool's earlier works that we realise the advance she has made as an artist, and that *Against Human Nature* is the result of a close study of its subject and some very real "experiences." The *motif* already indicated (which is handled with a delicacy and exquisite purity that cannot be over-praised), with the evangelistic labours of the Mercers and the tension of the mountain background, constitute a *materiel* which, in the hands of some writers, would have been lurid and unnatural as a transformation scene in an extravaganza. Miss Pool saves herself and us by her wholesome realism and her bubbling fun; she takes her tragedy as "Almina K. Drowdy, of Hoyt, Mass.," takes the mountain air: it seemed as if a person could be taken up for intoxication, just for breathing that air, but she had to breathe it, as it was the only air there was. Yet even the "relaxing woman" and "the abnormal girl," with whom Temple's shattered nerves bring her in contact, are not simply funny. The current of tragedy sweeps steadily on under the inimitable "bits" whose setting is "Hoyt, Mass.," and we realise, as we lay aside the book, that we know better than ever before how the nervous exhaustion of our day is due to a strained and non-natural mode of living, and that nothing in the world is so well worth while as to "stay as God made us." We are glad to recognise Miss Pool as an artist of genuine merit and of a distinctively American type, who in this book has met both Miss Wilkins and Miss Murfree, each on her own ground, and in our opinion has proved herself a better craftsman than either.