

NOVEL NOTES.

THE GRAY MAN. By S. R. Crockett. New York: Harper & Brothers. \$1.50.

Mr. Crockett must be wishing by this time he had never written *The Raiders*. That masterpiece among adventure stories is cast up to him whenever he attempts anything on the same lines. A crime in his past would not be more inconvenient. Well, he must continue to suffer until he gives us something that throws over us the glamour of the earlier book. Perhaps it owed something to its novelty; and perhaps *The Men of the Moss-Hags* and *The Gray Man* suffer a little because of their place in the series. But of this latter we have no intention of judging harshly. It is not the equal of *The Raiders* in the pleasure or in the vividness of its effect; but it is a good second, and would have been even a better had its subject been more agreeable. Yet a romance-writer knowing the legend was driven to use it.

It is the story of a certain Mure of Auchendrayne, a cunning, clever schemer, a conscienceless rascal, a scholar, a canting hypocrite, a consorter, for his wicked ends, with murderers, having himself a guilty knowledge of a cave of Death full of the remains of butchered human victims. He contrives the marriage of his son with Marjorie Kennedy, who thus becomes a witness of their misdeeds, and who brings evidence against them when they are brought to justice. Her sister Nell is the lighter heroine of the story, and Nell's lover, Lancelot Kennedy, a young and active hero, in at all the rides and fights and scuffles, is the main instrument in bringing the Mures to their doom. The burning and raiding and skirmishing never cease. Danger is never out of the air of this stormy Galloway, and the tussles and skirmishes are excellently pictured. Mr. Crockett's genius is not peaceable. When his heroes have something to knock down, and have a horse under them, they are the best fellows in the world, just as his best women are those that are always finding something to gird at with their tongues—only they are less genial company than their lovers. More than once already have we read the

chapter called "The Flitting of the Sow," the story of how a sow was tethered from sundown to sunset on the lands of Kerse, as the wager of battle between the Kennedys and the Craufords. The gathering to the fight is a gay scene, and our excitement rises and grows sympathetically even to the climax, where the messenger brings to Crauford the tidings of the fray. "Is the sow flitted?" is the old man's constant interruption to the continued flow of mournful news.

"O Kerse, hear me and weep; your braw and bonny son Jock, the flower of Kyle, is stricken through the heart and lies cauld and dead on the ground.' 'Scoundrel, dolt, yammering calf, answer or die. Is the sow flitted?' . . . 'The sow is flitted,' cried the man. . . . The old man fairly danced in a whirling triumph, cracking his fingers in the air with joy like a boy. 'My thumb for Jock!' cried he, 'the sow's flitted!'"

Auchendrayne as the Gray Man, a mysterious figure that looms on the eve and in the neighbourhood of treachery and danger, impresses us less, does not frighten us so much as in his sinister daylight appearances. There is something wrong there, but perhaps only with our dulled susceptibility. His death-scene is striking. Indeed, the book is well provided with dramatic scenes—the appearance of the king, James VI., before the lords and gentlemen of Carick assembled to try Auchendrayne, Marjorie Kennedy with the body of her old lover Gilbert, and the slaughter in the snow, stand out among the confusion of riding and raiding which is a necessary circumstance of the story. Save on the mysterious side the book is very powerful. Indeed, what seems faulty in the story, this same confusion and monotony of fighting, is really involved in the subject. And when we say, "Ah, but *The Gray Man* is not as *The Raiders*," we are not so much depreciating the power of the later work as we are thinking of the happier material of the other that contained no gruesome Sawny Bean's Cave.

THE WONDERFUL WHEEL. By Mary Tracy Earle. New York: The Century Co. \$1.25.

With this story the author enters the field into which many others have fol-

lowed Mr. Gable. But no one of them all—scarcely Mr. Cable himself—has made a more exquisite presentation of Louisiana Creole life. Moreover, the work may be considered not only fine but new, in that it deals with an aspect of the environment which no other writer has touched. The owner of "The Wonderful Wheel" is a poor potter who is an artist at heart, although he does not know it, and who fashions his clay into useless dragons and fantastic vases instead of plain, saleable pots. He lives alone with his motherless baby, whom he calls the little fiddler, because she scuttles about "so quick, like Toululu, the fiddler crab," and the story opens with a beautiful portrayal of the relation of father and daughter.

"One day Giacomo, the potter, started across Potosi, trundling an enormous green vase in the purple hand cart, while the baby ran ahead and behind and around him all at once. . . . A sweet storm wind was already rustling across Potosi Point, clearing the air for a gush of rain.

"Hurry on there, you little fiddler! I'll catch you," he began calling, and then the baby flew in front of him, like a little quail, lifting her shoulders as if they were wings, while Giacomo pursued at a measured trot."

But vases and babies are not good companions with which to outrun a shower.

"Giacomo looked at the cart, which needed his two hands, looked at the vase, and looked at the baby. Then, draping the ends of his mustache over his ears, he stooped, and all at once the little fiddler was no longer beseeching him from the ground, but was sitting inside of the vase, while he looked at her through its great round mouth. . . . They sped through the great slant sheets of rain, and the people who saw them thought that Giacomo was hurrying because for once he did not have his baby with him; and they never guessed that the little fiddler was curled up inside the vase, staring out in fascination at the slender, nimble drenched figure of her father, smiling and nodding at her while he pursued her headlong through the rain."

But the lookers-on understand when the father is struck down by the branch of a tree wrenched off by the wind, and the humble, pathetic tragi-comedy begins. No one will nurse the potter or care for his child, because the neighbours believe him to be a hoodoo. The story is wrought out with such simple, poignant beauty as makes the heart ache, while one smiles at the absurdity of the superstition that can be so cruel. The potter's wheel has often been seen through the uncurtained windows, shining with an unearthly light in the dark-

est night. Even the innocent, light-hearted young Clothilde, his niece, who comes from a far-off parish to nurse him, is terrified at the unexpected sight in the darkness, and flees out into the stormy night. Running on and on until too tired to be afraid, she reaches the shore of the bay and sees the phosphorescent breakers rolling in on the beach. She strikes her hands together, crying:

"It is de sea! de sea! An' de bon Dieu make de light! Oh, sure, sure! Father Henri tole me dat de bon Dieu make de light; an' dat is de way wid de wheel."

She thought on eagerly:

"It is not dat Uncle Giacomo is bad dat de light come faw him, it is because he is so good to de baby dat de bon Dieu sends light to his wheel on de dark nights when de win' blows de lamp out an' de stars is hid. I wish I had de sense of dat little fiddler, who mus' have seed dat wheel many, many times in de night, an' never had de t'ought to be afraid."

It is the parish doctor—one of the several finely drawn characters of the story—who discovers the simple, pathetic, beautiful truth and seeks to set it before the neighbours who are storming the potter's house. But the doctor only learns the futility of arguing against superstition, and it is not his efforts, but the outbreak of an epidemic—the yellow-fever, dreaded by Louisiana Creoles beyond all other diseases—that brings to the potter the opportunity for proving his supreme humanity. The style of the work is of the best; and much of its charm lies in its fresh, spontaneous, sweet humour.

ANDRIA. By Percy White. New York: George H. Richmond & Co. \$1.00.

Mr. White has not been fortunate in his recent literary attempts. The title of *Corruption* doubtless prevented many who had read *Mr. Bailey Martin* from even looking at this later work—there's that in a name!—and those who had the courage to read it found nothing to increase their admiration for the author's work. *Andria*, his latest novel, has neither the audacity of *Corruption* nor the freshness of *Mr. Bailey Martin*. The theme is old and the treatment conventional. The story is full, to be sure, of feints at the forbidden. *Andria* approaches the hedge that surrounds and should shield married life, and looks long and often toward the vast, boundless, downward slope outside that