

from November 21 to December 21, found four nights totally cloudy, fourteen partly cloudy, six clear with good "seeing," and seven clear with exceptionally fine conditions of vision. During the past summer Prof. Comstock, an astronomer familiar with the average atmospheric conditions at Eastern observatories, remained at the observatory from July 24 to August 23, for the purpose of making a preliminary study of the character and performance of the new meridian circle. His report upon the conditions of vision from the summit of the mountain is not less enthusiastic than that of the astronomers who have preceded him; and he found during the period above mentioned that there was no night upon which meridian observations would have been impossible, and but three upon which clouds would have appreciably interfered with observing. The average "seeing" during that period he estimates at four on a scale in which five would represent absolutely perfect conditions. The rapid progress which the Lick Trustees are now making towards the completion of the observatory, justifies the expectation that within a year regular observations may be begun.

RECENT NOVELS.

Princess. By M. G. McClelland. Henry Holt & Co.

A Playwright's Daughter. By Mrs. Annie Edwards. Harper's Handy Series.

My Friend Jim. By W. E. Norris. Macmillan & Co.

A Wicked Girl. By Mary Cecil Bay. Harper's Handy Series.

Gloria Victis. By Ossip Schubin. From the German, by Mary Maxwell. W. S. Gottsberger.

Aphrodite. By Ernest Eckstein. From the German, by Mary J. Safford. W. S. Gottsberger.

Peñita Ximénez. From the Spanish of Juan Valera. D. Appleton & Co.

The Buchholz Family. By Julius Stinde. Translated from the forty-ninth edition of the German, by L. Dora Schätz. London: George Bell & Sons; N. York: Chas. Scribner's Sons.

A GENUINE surprise awaits the reader on the last page of Miss McClelland's "Princess." All the writer is inclined to treat her not altogether sympathetic subject in a tentative way, which is highly suggestive of a moral set-square. When the catastrophe inevitable in that form of diversion is reached at last, after that never balancing, the surprise consists in finding that ideal morality is left, as usual, high and helpless in the air. The other end of the beam, being decidedly overweighted with the hero, the heroine, her loveliness, and her heart burdened with scruples, lands naturally and comfortably on the earth. There could be no possible objection to this very commonplace ending, if the author had only professed from the first to relate a plain tale, photographed conscientiously from real life. But this is precisely what she did not profess, until her mind misgave her that it would not conduce to the success of the book if the lovers were to be left to mourn apart the existence of logic and lofty ideals in this prosaic century. The struggle between this conviction and the elevated sentiments which she would prefer to advocate, if expediency would permit, is painfully apparent, and mars the sense of unity and calm strength with which alone such a topic can be successfully treated. There are more people who share charming Pocabontas Mason's prejudice against divorced people than the writer seems to imagine, though at first she attributes this and all other old-fashioned virtues to the survivors of the ancient Virginia

families, and to one Northern family. Hence, her hero, who, married or single, always looks much more than he means, and makes love to every pretty woman, does not excite the reader's sympathy, when Pocabontas, indignant at his duplicity in courting her before he is divorced, and at her audacity in trying, as a divorced man, to marry her, refuses him. That the Princess should reject a noble suitor, and eventually marry this dishonorable man, simply because he indulges in some pining of the cut-and-dried novel type, not only is a disappointment in an artistic sense, but contains a covert plea for divorce on the slightest grounds. The really touching and dramatic scene between the divorced parents, over the deathbed of their child, while the new husband waits impatiently in the parlor, is a waste of good material in a bad cause, since it leads to nothing, and merely serves to remove a possible obstacle to the hero's second marriage. Novels "with a purpose" are a mistake unless they handle the subject, generally an unpleasant one, with an unflinching boldness commensurate with their importance. Half-heartedness is out of place, and it is the characteristic quality of "Princess."

If an old favorite like Mrs. Annie Edwards sees fit to indulge in so hasty and uneven a bit of writing as "A Playwright's Daughter," she must take the consequences. According to her theory, as here set forth, an English father plus a Russian mother equals an irresistibly charming and thoroughly Russian daughter, Tania by name, whose wit and grace of manner no other nation could produce. But the Russian girl as depicted by Russian writers is a very different character. As a matter of fact, Tania is nothing but the American girl, as depicted in English fiction under the most favorable circumstances, with one important difference, viz.: that if any American girl were to take the liberties with etiquette which Tania allows herself, it would not be designated as "fascinating," but by some of the adjectives which are specially reserved for ill-bred visitors from the Western hemisphere. To make the inconsistency still more glaring, Tania is constantly referring to the strict propriety of her own conduct, which she has been drilled into during her school life on the Continent, as compared with the terribly lax ways of English girls. There were great possibilities in this girl of seven-teen, but the author, after having made her commit various solecisms and fall in love with the wrong man, as usual, not only declines to extricate her from the dilemma, but ruthlessly kills her that very night. One regrets her death, because it is quite uncalled for on any hypothesis, except the one that the author had wearied of her subject.

No book has recently presented so good an opportunity to compare old methods with new as Mr. W. E. Norris's sketch, "My Friend Jim." The subject is practically the same, so far as it goes, with the one developed at much greater length by Thackeray in "Vanity Fair." The careers of Becky Sharp and Hilda Turner are identical in scope. Jim is not unlike Rawdon Crawley, but, more fortunate, he escapes the latter's fate and does not wed his Becky. The man who assumes the second part of that rôle takes matters much as Rawdon did; there are several to take the part awarded to Lord Steyne; there is even the suggestion of a murder towards the last, and a neglected little son, although Hilda, unlike Becky, does not even pretend to sew on a tiny shirt for him long after he has grown up, in order to exhibit her maternal devotion. Still, the parallel holds good, so far as that isolated section of Thackeray's work is concerned. This is unfortunate in some respects. It makes Mr. Norris's work seem more superficial, more inadequate than it would if it could be read with no afterthought, Mr. Nor-

ris's stage is small, his characters few, his treatment graceful, as usual, but more than usually shallow—so much so, that he gives no specimens of his heroine's fascinations, though she rises, by reason of them and of her supreme selfishness alone, to the very apex of social rank. If this is a correct picture of the English society of the present day, there is no moral, except that whatever Mr. Norris fouches, however slightly, is sure to afford pleasant reading.

It is not usual to assign the rôle of background to the nominal heroine of a novel, but that is the wise course which Mary Cecil Hay has adopted in the story completed on her death-bed, "A Wicked Girl." It would have been difficult to draw an interesting portrait of the pretty and angelically amiable young person in detail. She would have seemed insipid, since her only claim to attention is the absolute absence in her composition of the sense of right and wrong, even to the point of murder when her jealousy is aroused. As a dark and mysterious background to the other characters, and revealed chiefly in hints, she is effective. The part of the heroine accordingly falls to her sister, who sustains it with great spirit, from the day that she undertakes the investigation of the Wicked Girl's first crime, through a courtship by another acute investigator, and a personal experience of the young person's methods, to the customary dispensation of poetical justice on the last page. Like other works from the same hand, it furnishes agreeable reading for an idle hour, though the superficial treatment of the really ingenious leading idea destroys all claims to greatness or to permanent literary value.

The second volume of Ossip Schubin's (*Lola Knaerschner*) *catalogue raisonnée* of the Austrian nobility, which bears the ambitious title "Gloria Victis," forms no exception to the rule that sequels are a literary mistake. The indomitable pride of that nobility forms her patriotic theme, but, according to her own showing, the majority of its members marry into the shopkeeping class with rascally adventurers. If she had been content to tell even such a discreditable tale in a straightforward manner, assigning to her nominal hero and heroine the prominence which is their right, and bringing the whole of the story within the covers of one volume, success of some degree might have crowned her efforts. But she attempts both too much and too little. Due subordination of the characters and incidents is not preserved; all the actors are treated on exactly the same plane. They resemble a group of figures by Lucas Cranach, where each individual defends his right to the foreground; or a company of actors ranged before the footlights at the end of a comedy, and all endeavoring to speak at least one word of the "tag." And tag it is throughout, the history of each person who is introduced being narrated with exactly the same amount of circumstantiality, without regard to the relation which he or she bears to the story. The translation seems to be well done, but the mistake of rendering *Viederer* by elder flowers appears as usual. Elder flowers are not cultivated in Paris for ornament, nor do they come on the first of May. Lilacs meet all the requirements, and leave *Holunder* to stand for elder.

There is no fault to be found with the manner in which the well-worn machinery of omens, goddesses, pirates, flower-girls, revellers, the talented sculptor of plebeian birth, the patrician maiden more beautiful than Venus herself, and the chorus of citizens, works in Ernest Eckstein's romance of ancient Greece, to which he has given the attractive title of "Aphrodite." Everything is perfectly planned and executed, but it remains a machine-made product. The spirit of the age is not present in that all-pervading and subtlest

form which alone affords an excuse for an historical romance, and which alone can insure its immortality. The reader is left cold and unmoved—an unpardonable fault—in the most forcible scenes, and does not feel that he has really come to know and love the clearly delineated characters. The Grecian temple of wood which serves for a church in many a village of New England awakens no emotions of art or beauty in the soul, such as the original fane of marble evoked even in untutored hearts. The author has not himself penetrated deeply enough into the spirit and homes of the people whom he seeks to portray, to produce more than a passing illusion on the mind of the reader. The translation reads smoothly.

"One of the jewels of literary Spain" is what a Spanish critic has pronounced the most popular book of recent years in that language, Don Juan Valera's novel, 'Pepita Ximinez.' In the special introduction which the author has prepared for this translation he styles it "the least insipid of the products of my unfruitful genius," thereby providing an explanation in addition to the one which he alleges for the extreme popularity of the book. Insipid is the exact word which applies to most novels of the modern Spanish school, if there be sufficient substance to merit that designation. Even Señor Valera's other books, which necessarily contain the same elements, to a certain degree, since they are inseparable from the Spanish character, do not possess the same claims to attention. 'Las Ilusiones del Dr. Faustino,' his most pretentious novel, which turns on the (in Spanish) almost inevitable pivot of the love of an uncle and niece, and their ineffectual struggles to overcome this specially attractive phase of the tender passion, is much inferior to the work under consideration. The plot is of the simplest, but it covers ground which is thoroughly familiar to many besides Pepita and her lover, who have traversed at least a corner of it at some period of their lives. Young Don Luis, the only child of a wealthy country gentleman, returns to his native town on a farewell visit to his father, previously to taking priest's orders, and going as a missionary to the East. As to his vocation the devout and handsome young fellow has not the slightest doubt, until he meets Pepita Ximinez, whom his father, in company with many others, is courting. Pepita is exquisitely drawn. Her womanly charm is so tangible that it unites with the young theologian's devoutness to lend a perfume of spring and flowers to the few and simple incidents. Even her manner of forcing Don Luis to avow his love at last does not seem unwomanly, under the peculiar circumstances, since she is evidently right in thinking that the priesthood is not the place for him. He immediately proves the justice of her argument by committing nearly all the capital sins in one day. The skill with which this situation is led up to, the profound but not cumbrous analysis of his own heart which the young man commits to writing in his letters to the priestly uncle who has brought him up, his struggles and Pepita's against what they regard as sacrilege, and the warmth and breadth of feeling which breathes from every page—these distinguish the story above others not dissimilar. Of the two indispensable elements of romance in a Southern land where the Roman Catholic faith prevails, love and religion, there is no better exponent than 'Pepita Ximinez.' The Introduction is of great interest. The translation gives an excellent idea of the original, though there are places where more simplicity of diction could have been employed to advantage. Here and there, too, little characteristic touches are omitted. It is well that this book, famous in all Spanish-speaking lands, has at last been presented to English readers in something approaching an adequate form, since the mutilated trans-

lation published in England under another title did not do justice to the delicacy of style which, as the author himself says, forms its principal charm.

German critics are a little inclined to attribute the phenomenal popularity of 'The Buchholz Family' to the praise of Prince Bismarck, and to the attention which it has attracted abroad. This is hardly fair and not at all probable, since Germany is not given to accepting the dicta of strangers on any point. The high price of novels in Germany also tends to keep sales low, even with a popular work. Yet this series of letters from a middle-class, typically German *Hausfrau*, who is utterly devoid of sentiment, poetry, of any feeling save jealousy, of even instinct save the maternal one, has passed into its fiftieth edition. It is not so remarkable when examined with a little more attention. The tendency in Germany, even more than in America, has been in the past to select subjects for literary treatment from the two extremes of the social scale. The books which have made a reputation have all depicted either the aristocracy or the peasantry. As the peasant did not peruse the literature which affected him, to any great extent, his opinion of the sketches cannot be known. When the same writers, nearly all belonging to the middle classes, attempted to picture the nobility, it is to be feared that the nobility smiled—if it ever saw the attempts. At all events, neither noble nor peasant recognized his own portrait as sufficiently faithful to inspire him with a desire to possess a copy for himself, to the number of many thousands. The truth is, that the great success of these brief sketches of middle-class people and their ways, drawn by one of themselves, is due to the fact that they have been recognized as perfect likenesses by the people who unconsciously sat for them. Not that they make a personal application to their own case, but they recognize the likeness to their neighbors, which does not impeach the truthfulness of the portrait, but merely adds a zest to their enjoyment in contemplating it. More than this, Dr. Stinde has made his Wilhelmine Buchholz so vitally feminine in her petty traits that she will appeal to the heart of many a woman in other ranks of society, who would, nevertheless, consider this German woman "common." Common she certainly is; but the way, for instance, in which she breaks off and renews her connection with the hated Bergfeldt family, is not unknown in other lands and circles. The other actors possess the same vital quality, though they are limited to casual exhibitions of it, in subordination to Wilhelmine. As a whole, they present a perfectly real but depressing class of the community, which is wholly wrapped up in its own petty interests, which has no ambition to elevate itself in any way—which, indeed, seems unconscious that there is anything higher than itself and its unintelligent ways, except when some member of the circle, like Emil Bergfeldt, chances to recall the fact by marrying a little more money than it is accustomed to. Frau Bergfeldt has not an idea beyond snubbing or conciliating her dearest female friends, who are also her natural enemies, and getting her daughters married; yet her native mother wit enables her to say things which are clever enough and droll enough to appeal to highly cultivated readers, if the latter will take the small trouble of adjusting the focus to their own vision. The translation is very good, though phrases occur on almost every page where a more literal rendering would produce an equally spirited effect, and would contain more of the full flavor of the original.

BLUE-BEARD.

Gilles de Rais, Maréchal de France, dit Barbe-bleue (1404-1440). Par l'Abbé Eugène Bossard.

D'après les Documents inédits réunis par M. René de Maulde. Paris: H. Champion. 1886. 8vo, pp. 426, clx.

In the fifteenth century the two most picturesque figures are Joan of Arc and Gilles de Rais, and fate threw them together, for De Rais was placed in charge of Joan on her expedition for the relief of Orleans, and remained by her side until the repulse at the Porte St. Honoré. In death, also, they were, in some sense, not divided, for Joan was burned for sorcery in 1431 and Gilles in 1440. Here, however, the comparison ends; for Joan is enshrined in French tradition as little short of a saint, while Gilles is regarded in his native Brittany as the original of the monster Blue-beard. We are not sufficiently versed in the dubious science of folk-lore to decide whether the Abbé Bossard has made out his case that the Marshal's career is really the source of the nursery tale, but he has undoubtedly shown that, to the Breton peasant, the two personages are one, dissimilar as were the crimes of the real and of the fictitious monster.

Gilles de Rais was born of the noblest parentage, and inherited ample possessions, increased by his marriage with the heiress Catherine de Thouars, rendering him one of the wealthiest men in France. In the troublous times of the English wars he threw himself eagerly into the desperate cause of Charles VII., and his conspicuous gallantry was rewarded, at the age of twenty-five, with the high dignity of Marshal of France. He was not only a *preux chevalier*, but a man of education and culture. Chance allusions show that in his library he had St. Augustin's 'City of God,' Ovid's 'Metamorphoses,' Valerius Maximus, and Suetonius; and one of the reasons given for his loving an Italian adventurer was the choice Latinity of the latter's conversation. Of music and the drama he was also passionately fond. With such advantages and accomplishments, it is not easy to set bounds to the career open to him in the war of liberation which finally expelled the English from France.

Nevertheless, in 1432 or 1433 he withdrew from active life to his estates, and seemingly devoted himself to dazzling the multitude with a display of regal magnificence. In Orleans, during four months in 1435, he is reported to have squandered 80,000 gold crowns, and to support his prodigality he was forced to sell one splendid fief after another. His family, alarmed, procured royal letters interdicting him from making contracts, but Jean V., Duke of Brittany, forbade the publication of the letters within his dominions, and continued to take advantage of his spendthrift vassal's necessities by purchasing his properties.

The reckless noble, however, in these sales reserved a right of redemption in six years. He had become infatuated with alchemy, and, in daily expectation of mastering the grand arcana, he was ever on the threshold of illimitable wealth and power. Now alchemy was almost invariably connected with necromancy. The aid of demons was requisite to enable the adept to penetrate the occult secrets of nature, and Gilles was ever on the watch for an expert who could control or placate the malignant spirits to the fulfilment of his desires. He was consequently the dupe of a succession of charlatans, and nothing in the history of magic is more instructive than the simplicity of his own relation of the credulity with which he accepted the excuses of his quick-witted deceivers for their failures. They could always at will evoke demons and obtain responses when alone, but when he was present the familiar spirits obstinately refused to appear, or to accept the written compacts, signed with his blood, which he vainly sought to transmit to them. To win the favor of a demon