

NEW NOVELS.

A GIPSY STORY.

To read *TAMISIE*, by Rosamond Napier (Hodder and Stoughton, pp. 503, 6s.), is to spend months in the open air, on Exmoor, with the most eager, the most exactly observing of landscape painters. There is no incident in the book. But even more than that is the stimulus given to eye and ear, for the sounds of the moor are related with as much precision as the

Perhaps only Mr. Hardy has registered with more exquisite accuracy the voices of Exmoorland. The book is full of music. The landscape painter is too insistent perhaps, but never second-rate. We have passed a score of passages to quote, and spanning each have said, Not this: there are better ones. To quote one would do injustice to the rest. Of her hero Miss Napier tells us: "The perceptions of the Stag-Fellow were delicate. He passed enough life as a shepherd passing through a flock of sheep, recognising this and that. Little expressions, little self-betrays hidden from another, even as they are hidden from the sheep themselves." There Miss Napier describes her own gifts. Like Sanpriel, she thinks better with the whisper of wind and babble of water in her ears."

Tamisie is a gipsy story of sixty years ago, when there were gipsies of pure breed in England, not merely tinkers mongrels, when the Romany speech, Romany songs, and Romany fiddles still had life in them. Miss Napier has steeped herself in Borrow and Keats. From books she has evidently gathered with diligence, but a real imagination has welded her material much. True not to literal fact, her pictures of gipsy life and character live and vibrate; and if the sixty-years-ago gipsies were not like hers, they might have been, should have been. *"Tamisie"* *"Aylwin"* is but a feeble record of sentimentality. These are not made-up folk of the operatic stage. Among the men are brutes and rascals, among the women fearsome and dangerous creatures. They are seen through the eyes and experience of a Gentile, an educated young Englishman, a pathetic failure, whose sensitiveness, under a false accusation has driven him out of the common haunts of his kind. He sees the wandering folk in all their limitations. Nothing is abated of their poverty of mental resource, their cruelty, their trickery, but there is a full recognition of the romance which is truly theirs, no Gentile invention, and of the affection which genuinely exists along with their too ready flash of knives and their beating of women. "Round the whole race was a great enveloping love."

The tale of Sanpriel and Gilderoy is a strange, pathetic idyll, very unfamiliar and, if we except the stigmata incidents, very good. *Tamisie* is no gipsy, but a sturdy, healthy, young mid-Victorian English girl brought up with the healthier ideals of today. Her nerves and pulses are quivering with life, and her heart is craving for adventure. She has the egoism and the generosity of her age, and she is fascinating enough to make us keenly interested in her choice between two lovers, the middle-aged, successful Egyptologist and the wistful, wounded Stag-Fellow. But the being we watch with most delight of all is Exmoor. And we think Miss Napier is with us there

A. M.

"THE HAPPY WARRIOR."

Mr. A. S. M. Hutchinson's new novel, *THE HAPPY WARRIOR* (Alton Rivers, Limited, pp. vii. 352, 6s.), is, first and foremost, excellent reading. The style of the book is full of vigour; the author keeps us, as it were, merrily sailing in a stiff breeze, with sunlight on the water and showers of spray falling continually about our prow. He tells the tale of a disputed succession, and we are introduced at once to Mr. and Mrs. Letham on the very day when they hear that young Lord Burdon has been shot in Africa, they believing, and everyone else believing with them, that they are next of kin. They are pleased with admirable clearness before our eyes, he in his nonchalance and good-humour, she in her eagerness and petulance; and the sympathetic discernment with which Mr. Hutchinson treats them is denied to none of the many characters he introduces to us. Heralding them comes Egbert Hunt, that somewhat improbable page on whom so much is to depend, and who, perhaps on that account, is whipped into a sort of unnatural prominence and made the butt of a wit which in its more normal exercise flavours the whole book so acceptably. Rollo Letham, their son and heir, is in the cradle when we first hear of him, and he is never to be hero, though in the end he succeeds to the name. The true hero, who might have ousted Rollo, is in his cradle also; he is Percival Letham, the "Happy Warrior" as sketched by Wordsworth, and how he came to be born (under what involved, pathetic, tragical circumstances), and how, bravely and simply, he accepted the tragedy which culminated in his birth with the joyous, chivalrous intensity of his boyhood and youth between, his training as a pugilist among the gipsies and the tremendous fight in which he lays that champion Foxy Pinsent low—all these things are the backbone of a narrative full of romance in its conception and yet close to life throughout, a narrative which everywhere combines unusual richness of fancy with unusual truth of imagination. "Once Across the Luger" was a notable book, and "The Happy Warrior" is not less notable. It is full of movement and action—the description of the fight thrills us for seven pages,—yet the author can touch the deeper problems of life with a sure hand, can wake our tenderest feelings and pass on. Not many writers who have as much to say as he has can say it with this complete buoyancy and directness and goodwill. It is with pleasure as well as with confidence that we anticipate for his novel the success which it deserves

B. S.

MONSIGNOR BENSON'S NOVEL

Monsignor Benson's *COME BACK! COME BACK!* (Hutchinson, pp. viii. 404, 6s.) is as sensational as its title, and it will be very pleasant to his readers. To be of their number you must be of his faith or very simple-minded or the violence of his sincere prejudice cannot but be an irritant. He sets out to prove that what he sees black is black, and calls no contrast in evidence, or, if any white is allowed to appear, it is only the white of the writing, which, like so much of the production of the Benson brothers, seems to be written very large and clear in white ink on a blackboard. Wipe the writing out and the blackboard remains, like John Davidson's butterflies or the New Zealand "bushbills" "all black." There is no contradicting it. The writing is so smooth and fluid and fluent, so swiftly done, so soon faded out, that you are never able to grasp the argument. You are not given time to think for no sooner is the blackboard empty than it is filled up again with the same thing in different words, but words once more fluent and round and smooth. And your final impression is, as it was meant to be, that the blackboard is black. All of which amounts to this, that Monsignor Benson has once more taken history and historical figures and turned them to his own uses. Henry VIII. was a villain. Elizabeth was worse, and the world has been at the mercy of villains ever since, and will be until . . . until it is universally admitted that the blackboard is black, or, to let a metaphor, that everything outside Rome is damned. To us it is

a matter of opinion. To Monsignor Benson it is a matter of life and death, a matter in which his honour and sincerity are at stake. To it he sacrifices everything that he possibly can—form, economy; in a word, art. One thing, however, he cannot sacrifice. One thing is too strong for his convictions—his native story-telling instinct. That survives his violence, his mawkishness, his inability to create atmosphere, his *longueurs*, his lack of humour, and cajoles his reader into interest in his puppets and good-tempered acceptance of his unfair manipulation of them. It is always necessary to read the beginning and the end of his books, and when they have been approached it is difficult not to read the middle. He is the best and the worst of the Bensons.

G. C.

In *THE DISTANT LAMP* (Hodder and Stoughton, pp. xi. 294, 6s.) Mr. Harold Begbie tells the pathetic tale of the children's crusade; how, in the superstitious Middle Ages, thousands of children, inflamed with what they believed to be the love of Christ, left their homes and marched under the leadership of a shepherd boy to Marseilles, expecting the sea to divide and take them dry-shod to the Holy Land; and how the remnant that persevered to the last were conveyed in ships to the East and sold there into slavery. He concentrates interest upon the fortunes of one family—Hildebert, the dreamy, beautiful boy; Falaise, his sister; and the sceptical elder brother Gaspard, who went with them to protect them,—and it is a fault of the book, perhaps, that he expects us to be more interested than is possible in the adventures—the necessarily contrived adventures—of this trio. The story, taken as a story, is thrilling, well knit, and well told, but behind a thrilling story lurks a ghastly history, and this makes the novelist's familiar tricks unpleasant. The tale opens with a characteristic picture of the home life of a prosperous banker in the little town of Châteauneuf, and the manners and customs of the period are presented vividly throughout.

B. S.

There are many fine things in Mr. S. R. Crockett's latest romance, *THE MOSS TROOPERS* (Hodder and Stoughton, pp. viii. 313, 6s.). There are a thwarted abduction by a Royal Duke, midnight landings of masked and armed smugglers, the storming and burning of the gaol of Stranryan, and so forth. The background, too, is Galloway and the sentiment of Galloway folks during the Napoleonic wars—a time when the district objected to sending recruits to a war which did not interest them, when even the authorities connived at the "free trade," when, upon the appearance of the military, the lads took to the heather and the women did the farm work, driving the plough and threshing the grain. There are the makings of a capital story in all this, and Mr. Crockett's is no pretence hand. Readers who are fond of romance will, accordingly, find much that will please them in the book. Nevertheless it is far from being a complete success. There is a lack of vividness in certain of the incidents; the character of Falaise, upon which so much depends, is a capital intention not quite fulfilled, and the narrative has not that strong continuous grip which marks its author's work when he is at his best.

C. S. C.

Those of us whose work is critical rather than creative must often find ourselves puzzled at the way certain novels can be accomplished and even delicate and yet lifeless at the root. A degree of insight and reality the mere process of the years, it had seemed to us, must bring with them; control of the story-telling mechanism we thought of as a rarer equipment. *ROSEMARY AND RUE*, by Beatrice Stott (Sidgwick and Jackson, pp. 430, 6s.), is one of the books that baffles our supposition. It has for its subject the schooldays and youth of a vital, highly strung daughter of a "modern" poet; it is skilful by the way, and it really rouses our interest in Rosemary Stafford and her surroundings. But when we are presently asked to use this interest to conceive of Rosemary as wrecking her life to fulfil her verbal promise to marry a man who, since the promise was made, has betrayed her, and whom she has long grown to detest, the psychology crumbles. The tale's skill and accomplishment appear in the light of this spiritual inconsistency hardly more than a decoy. The Rosemary we had been taught to care for was a real—if anything an over-real—person.

M. S. G.