

20 April, 1895.

The Saturday Review.

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REVIEWS.

MR. S. R. CROCKETT'S LATEST.

"Bog-Myrtle and Peat." By S. R. Crockett. London: Bliss, Sands & Foster. 1895.

MR. CROCKETT has "gathered," so he says, "from the years 1889 to 1895"—whatever that phrase may mean—a number of very indifferent short stories, most of which have some casual connection with the province of Galloway. Mr. Crockett has so many admirers that he will forgive our dissent when we marvel at his fame. The reviewer is not a Scotchman, and may lose some subtle quality through that misfortune. These stories appear to his eyes to be simply failures in adaptation. "Saint Lucy of the Eyes," for instance, is mainly Mr. Anthony Hope's gallant adventurer—with Stevenson's drowsy woman with the feline eyes, Poe's horror of whiteness (upon which Mr. Hudson has enlarged) and other reminiscences worked in. "Fenwick Major's Little Un," again, is a "manly" story in the vein of Sims: "Three cheers for the little wife, I say. What are you fellows snuffling at there? Why can't you cheer?" (We give it up.) Barrie has evidently most to answer for in the humorous sketches. Mr. Crockett has still to learn not to snivel at his own essays in pathos, nor to be alarmed at his own bogle stories. In another place he tells an extremely silly story about "Seven Dead Men," and proceeds: "This was the story we told, and there was not a face among the audience that did not blanch." It needs a strong story to carry that rider. It makes a weak one absurd. Poe explained all that to Lever years ago.

Apart from the fact that the stories are mostly lengthy (for their matter), pointless, and ill told, Mr. Crockett writes a kind of rheumatic English that is at times positively painful. It is the one thing unquestionably his. He is afflicted with a few deservedly obsolete words. An irresistible impulse makes him use them, an equally irresistible persuasion that not one reader in a hundred will understand them, forces him to add the meaning in brackets. At a moving moment each man grasps his "jockteleg." Then the action is suspended while Mr. Crockett explains that he means "the smuggler's sheath knife." He writes, too, of "that inbred belief of Galloway in itself, which the ill affected and envious *nominat* its conceit"; he tells us "no man could climb that *mural precipice* and live," meaning not a huge wall, but simply just a common precipice; and remarks, *à la Chateaubaud*, in his preface, "the imagination of my heart is left unto me desolate." And so on, and so on. The italics are, of course, ours.

He asserts in this preface that he really has dreams and ideas of his own, but that they leave him when he awakes—"as the rosy fingers of the dawn melt and the broad day fares forth, the vision fades." This perhaps partly explains Mr. Crockett's variegated matter. He offers, indeed, the present miscellany as an attempt to gather this "fairy gold" of his dreams. That is certainly not at all how it strikes us. "Fairy gold" indeed, and "The Book of my Youth, of my Love, and of my Heart!" Go to, Mr. Crockett! One must live, perhaps, and even write miscellanies, but one need not give oneself airs of that sort. It provokes a reviewer to be hard on you.

A special appeal is made to the patriotic Scot by Mr. Andrew Lang's stirring ballad of Kenmure. "The heather's in a blaze, Willie," it runs, and, though dealing with Kenmures chiefly, conjures up a vision in the mind of the imaginative reader of innumerable ministers rising to the tune of "Remember R. L. S., Willie, Remember fair Barrie," and taking their pens and fortunes in their hands for the sake of "fairy gold." In a note Mr. Crockett thanks Mr. Lang for thus spicing "the plain fare here set out in honour of the ancient Free Province." The present reviewer cannot help doubting whether Mr. Lang has really read these stories he has so kindly introduced. The longest of them (78 pp.), "in honour of the ancient Free Province," is Italian, and has absolutely nothing to do with Galloway except that the hero claims to have been born there. The next is a story of the Commune,

told by a German waiter to ("in honour of the ancient Free Province") a Galloway man. John Arniston, hero of the next in order, was a Fleet Street journalist who robbed a postman in London ("in honour of the ancient Free Province"). Honour indeed to the ancient Free Province! Some enterprising medicine vendor with a drug on hand might do worse than test local patriotism with "Galloway pills"—a copy of a special ballad round each box—"in honour of the ancient Free Province." One cannot help admiring the sturdy patriotism that makes this kind of book a commercial success.

AN IDEAL SPORTSMAN.

"Sir Samuel Baker: a Memoir." By T. Douglas Murray and A. Silva White. London: Macmillan & Co. 1895.

WHAT the new continent of America was to the England of Queen Elizabeth, the unknown interior of Africa has been to the England of Queen Victoria. Each new continent in turn has afforded scope for the development of the national characteristics of courage, perseverance, resourcefulness, and for the satisfaction of the national passion for adventure. It is true, broadly speaking, that in men of action, as well as in men of letters, only a faint and shadowy resemblance can be traced between this age of decadence, "this ghastly, thin-faced time of ours," and "the spacious times of great Elizabeth," that lusty old world still in the heyday of its vigour—with its Shakespeare and his circle of Immortals, to represent the life of letters, and its Humfrey Gilbert and Richard Grenville, not to speak of Raleigh, and Drake, and Hawkins, to represent the life of adventure.

Strange to say, it is in our adventurers, not in our poets, that we approach nearest to the men of those days of England's greatness; for Gordon is certainly the equal, we should be inclined to say the superior, of Humfrey Gilbert; and the noblest figure except Livingstone in the list of our African explorers, Sir Samuel Baker, is not unworthy of a place among the stout adventurers of Elizabethan England. Born in 1821, Samuel White Baker had the blood of a fighting sea-captain in his veins, for his grandfather, Valentine Baker, gave up his career in the Royal Navy to take the command of a privateer which he himself equipped, and in which he fought in 1782 a French frigate double the size of his sloop, and forced the man-of-war to strike her flag. Baker's adventurous nature, restless in its quest of active employment, tried more than one occupation before he found the life-work for which he was made. His eight years' labour of agricultural development in the colony of Newera Eliya in Ceylon; his work of railway enterprise in Turkey; but, above all, his devotion to the pursuit of big-game, had acted as a preparation when, at nearly forty years of age, he set his face for Africa, entering the yet unexplored interior by the old waterway of the Nile. He went out in the main as a sportsman; but the sportsman, as in the case of Selous, soon developed into the explorer. After making himself acquainted with the Abyssinian tributaries of the Nile, he started again, accompanied by an ideal wife for an explorer, to meet Speke and Grant returning from the discovery of the Victoria Nyanza. Meeting with and parting from the two successful travellers at Gondokoro, Baker continued his expedition under almost overwhelming difficulties, actually worked his way on to the kingdom of Unyoro, and discovered what he supposed to be the second source of the Nile, a large body of water which he named Albert Nyanza, though he just missed discovering the great Ruwenzori mountains when within easy reach of them.

Returning to England, where his achievements received the very inadequate acknowledgment of knighthood, he lived chiefly in Norfolk for four years, and then, in 1869, the Khedive appointed him to be Governor-General of the country of the Equatorial Nile, with a special commission to suppress the slave-trade.

Here Baker believed he had found a work worth doing, and went, sanguine of complete success, to the enterprise in which he was to be followed by Gordon.