

troversies and may even inspire clashing enthusiasms; to dwell on truisms without impatience, and examine paradoxes without alarm; to realise ever that we are a part of the great community through which the Eternal has worked for ages, and have our share in the spiritual privileges and solemn duties which belong to all members of that community—these were a part of the message he had for those of his generation."

This book is evidence that one at least of his disciples has taken the message to heart.

NEW NOVELS.

A Free Lance of To-day. By Hugh Clifford, C.M.G. (Methuen & Co.)

IN several ways this book is rather noteworthy. To literary men the name of its writer is connected with interesting stories, short stories of the Malay Archipelago. On the whole, we think the short story a vehicle more suited to the author's gifts than the form he has chosen in this book. And better than either, perhaps, would be the purely descriptive book, without attempt at story of any sort; for the author is not of the company of born story-tellers, but he has a gift of description, and, above all, he possesses a rich fund of intimate knowledge of the people and manners and customs of that portion of the Far East which is connected with his name, both in literature and in official circles. In the same way that the author who writes of Anglo-Indian life challenges comparison with Mr. Kipling, so the story-writer who would interest us in the Malays enters at once into some sort of competition with Mr. Joseph Conrad. To the supporter of the circulating library, the comparison with the author of 'Plain Tales' is the more serious matter; to the literary man the comparison with Mr. Conrad is perhaps a more severe test. Mr. Conrad is a very scrupulous literary artist; the author of the present volume—who, we have reason to believe, keenly appreciates Mr. Conrad's methods—is not. So far as his work is concerned he would appear to have derived a good deal more from Mr. Kipling, and that not to the advantage of his book. The typical mental outlook of the British official in the East is an impossible one for the story-writer. It is not Mr. Hugh Clifford's. Yet the official standpoint, the official habit of thought, hampers him in the present volume materially. Reticence of phrase is excellent in story, but reticence and cautiousness of thought and opinion are apt rather to chill than to convince. The story-writer must be prepared to commit himself if he would have his readers follow him unreservedly and with sympathy. In the present volume the author is irritatingly careful to "hedge" over the expression of every opinion. He gives us glimpses of an interesting and individual view of the great question of the relations of East and West, and then hastens to wind up the sentence or paragraph with a colourless utterance, as who should say: "But do not, I beg of you, connect me in any way with such an opinion, for or against; and, to be sure, there are at least five-and-twenty aspects of every conceivable question." That may be diplomacy, but it is not story-writing. Having said so much, we pay a tribute to the very real interest of this tritely named story of the Malays, which treats of a strange land with

real, first-hand knowledge. Such romance as it contains is immediate romance; its local colour is veritable. A young man of imaginative temperament is bewitched by the glamour of the East into something like contempt for his own kind, and hunger for an adventurous life among the brown people of the Malays. He enters heart and soul into an illegal adventure, the object of which is to supply warlike arms and munitions to the king and people of Achen, the little state in which brown men are fighting for their lives and independence against the inevitable dominance of the Dutch. A pair of English girls, tourists yachting with their father, serve to introduce the sentimental interest; and here the author's machinery creaks woefully. But the young Englishman of the blue-eyed Saxon type does reach the king's city in Achen, and thus we have this native state depicted. This, and the passages describing the natives' methods of fighting with the Dutch, form the real interest of the book. The rest, the story, is for the most part mechanical, the not over-deft manipulation of well-worn properties of fiction. But the people of remote Achen live for us here on the printed page; we see and feel the hot jungle of the land; and for this we are grateful.

In Piccadilly. By Benjamin Swift. (Heinemann.)

THE fiction-reading public are aware by this time that Benjamin Swift is an author to be reckoned with. 'In Piccadilly' is not by any means the most powerful piece of work he has given us, but it is worth reading, if for no other reason, because it is sincere and written with workmanlike care and precision. If we may say so without offence, we think the author takes himself a little too seriously as a prophet, but perhaps that tendency is a part of his sincerity, and, in these days particularly, sincerity is an undoubted virtue. The present story is a picture of modern society life, but there is not a flippant line in it. We fear, also, that there is not a chuckle in it for the reader. The author has a message for society, even as John Knox had, and he seems to regard it almost as earnestly. He does not accuse society of mere flippancy, or vanity, or giddiness. When speaking of the West-End he seems to think rather of Sodom and Gomorrah than of Vanity Fair; and withal, whilst undoubtedly led at times into melodrama, he never caricatures, and does not often exaggerate. But he lacks humour and breadth of vision; time has not so far mellowed his outlook upon life, and in consequence we have no reference to the thousands of kind-hearted, clean-minded, foolish, sentimental, sterling people, who are at least as much a part of modern society as its rakes and decadents of both sexes. The tragic end of the story we find mechanical and melodramatic. The rest of the book, however, shows restraint and dignity; the author's portraits are true to life, gloomy as they are, and in several places he shows insight into the bases of human action and emotion which is wonderfully keen and vivid, besides being pitiless. And here we think pitilessness is justified. We cannot but sigh, however, for the mellowness that comes with a sense of humour.

The Banner of Blue. By S. R. Crockett. (Hodder & Stoughton.)

MR. CROCKETT is always readable when he is on familiar ground, and his present romance, though it appeals specially to Scottish sympathies, is good enough to interest the general reader. All can recognize the self-sacrificing steadiness of a character like John Glendonwyn's, though it will appeal to them rather in his relations to his tyrannical old father the laird of Castle Gower, and to the selfish and shallow profligate his elder brother, than to the blue banner of the dissenting Presbyterians. The mosses of Galloway, the hill-mists and sea-breezes, the hundred touches of the student of nature to the manner born, combine with good characterization of his countrymen to make this novel not unworthy in parts of the best of the author's work. So far as it suffers deduction in other parts it is in the fact that some personages, like the loyal old Scotch butler, and the voluble old Scotch handmaid (who, of course, have matrimonial views of the quaintest kind), and even the primitive and saintly herdsman of Bannagour, are but slight variants of types our author and others have made familiar. The Lowland dialect is sound and not overdone, save perhaps in the case of old Betty; a few words of Gaelic are less accurate, at least in spelling. In Veronica, the woman whose shrewdness of perception does wrong to the warmth of her heart, the hero seems to miss his worthiest affinity, and the reader sees too little of the best character in the book.

Abraham's Sacrifice. By Gustaf Janson. (Methuen & Co.)

THE incident which gives name to this strange book arises from an oath taken by a band of Boers to punish with death one who has informed the British of the whereabouts of some hidden war material. A father finds his son the unintentional agent in the matter. Abraham being distracted between his oath and his natural affection, Isaac anticipates him by a voluntary death. The tragic episode is forcibly described, as are many incidents of the guerilla period of the late war. The writer does not shine so much in presenting warlike operations with distinctness or probability, and British army nomenclature is unfamiliar to him. "Adjutants," in our sense, are different from orderlies or aides; and our thickest-headed cavalry leaders do not charge for three miles! A greater drawback to English readers is the morbid horror of all war which is the key-note of the book, and the naïve perversion of the motives which induced this country to fight for South African supremacy. Evidently the Swedish author gives us no credit either for sense or humanity.

The Shutters of Silence. By G. B. Burgin. (John Long.)

MR. BURGIN has devised an ingenious plot, and worked it well out to its logical conclusion; he has laid his scene largely in that part of Canada which he has made familiar to readers of his other novels, and has introduced the Trappist monastery and its inner workings with judgment and effect; and yet the novel is not really so successful