

something more nearly akin to 'Dowsabel.' And in that wonderful metre, which seems to overcome awkwardness, one is hardly shocked at a naked word when some trivial things, of which it is not polite to talk nowadays, are spoken of; just as one accepts 'naturalness' in the picture of a Dutch master. One is almost persuaded to believe that anything, however 'impossible,' might become agreeable when cast by a Greek 'master' in hexameters. Certainly, having passed through their sounding ways, as Hesiod handled them, the tillers of the soil, the plough and other implements, the soil itself and 'mute insensate things' with which the husbandman has to do, win a new interest and distinction. Having had our thoughts pleasantly but seriously concerned with the 'kindly fruits of the earth,' and the methods of their production, we may even at this time of day (as the expression is) come away with a certain sense of an almost religious relation towards the ground, as the abode of a maternal goddess who silently endows men, as Lucretius said in one of his fine lines:—

'Munificat tacita mortales muta salute,'—

and receives each, when, after labour in bleak places, the hour of his rest comes, to sleep in her bosom.

J. B. BURY.

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### ART. III.—SCOTTISH FICTION OF TO-DAY.

1. *The Railway Man and his Children.* By MRS. OLIPHANT. Macmillan.
2. *Catriona.* By R. L. STEVENSON. Cassell.
3. *The Little Minister.* By J. M. BARRIE. Cassell.
4. *Kilmallie.* By HENRY JOHNSTON. David Douglas.
5. *Margaret Drummond, Millionaire.* By SOPHIE F. F. VEITCH.
6. *The Works of Annie S. Swan.*

THE promiscuous literary feast, of which a menu is here given—consisting, however, it should be carefully noted, of typical dishes, not of tit-bits—will suggest many curious reflections to Scotsmen who have been brought up on Scott

and Galt. Of these, one cannot but play the Aaron's rod to all the rest. That is the tendency of all the writers—except perhaps Mrs. Burnett-Smith, who does not depict Scottish life specially so much as simple and essentially religious life wherever it is to be found within the borders of the United Kingdom—to look askance at, if not to shirk, Scotland of to-day, and to let their imaginations have scope in the Scotland of yesterday, and still more of the day before yesterday. Take for an example Mrs. Oliphant's *The Railway Man and his Children*. James Rowland is a modern self-made Scotsman, it is true, but there is nothing specially Scottish about him; he might as well have been born in Lancashire, Yorkshire, or the Midlands. He is not nearly so real as his far too generous wife, and infinitely less likeable. He is indeed not nearly so real as Eddy Saumarez, that curious and essentially cockney study in heredity and the New Humour, whom, forger though he stands confessed, Rowland is daring enough to accept as a son-in-law. But, from the purely Scottish point of view, the character which, as a study, stands head and shoulders above all others in this story is Aunt Jean, of the Sauchiehall Road, Glasgow—narrow-minded, unjust, un-Christian, at heart an old maid, and yet not ungenerous, and altogether delightful. But Aunt Jean belongs to the Scotland of yesterday. If she is actually to be found in the region to which Mrs. Oliphant gives the name of Sauchiehall Road, one may rely upon it that she but lags superfluous on the stage. Take again *Kirsteen*, which is an infinitely more powerful story than *The Railway Man and his Children*, and in which, as a gallery of Scottish portraits, Mrs. Oliphant surely reaches the high-water mark of her power. In *Kirsteen* Mrs. Oliphant deliberately shirks the presentation to her readers of the Scotland of to-day. It is described expressly as a story of seventy years ago, and certainly the terrible Drumcarro, who is its true hero, would not be permitted to live outside a lunatic asylum in the present time.

But it may be said, and with truth, that Mrs. Oliphant belongs to an earlier generation of novelists than the present, though she works at least as hard as the youngest of them. But the

inclination to let Scotland of to-day alone is exhibited in an even more pronounced fashion by the younger artists in fiction, of whom the chief representatives on this side of the Tweed are, of course, Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Barrie. In *Catriona*, Mr. Stevenson is seen at his very best, not indeed as a *raconteur*—as a mere story *Catriona* is greatly inferior to its predecessor *Kidnapped*—but as a patient delineator of character. He has still, it is true, to prove that he can draw a ‘real’ woman. *Catriona* is an ambitious failure. She attracts neither by her beauty nor by her disposition. She is destitute alike of genuine heart and of genuine archness. She is but a poor coquette, and one is quite convinced that she will make a poor wife. Even when she and David Balfour are confronted with an almost Shandean problem, by the circumstance of their living under the same roof in Holland, it is impossible to take much interest in her fate. One is convinced that in reality she must have been ‘nae temptation.’ Miss Grant is indeed a much stronger character than *Catriona*, precisely as Rebecca in *Ivanhoe* is a much stronger character than Rowena. But she has not the making of a heroine in her. Rather, like Kirsteen, is she destined to become one of those dear, delightful, if also sharp-tongued old spinsters who gave pleasant parties, and otherwise helped to make Edinburgh winters tolerable half a century ago. It was doubtless when her hair was silvered, and when she delighted to give caustic little lectures on ethics and etiquette in her arm-chair that Mr. Stevenson met Miss Grant. But if Mr. Stevenson’s women are still ambitious failures, his men are the reverse. James More is a superb scoundrel; as such, indeed, he is a vast improvement on Rashleigh Osbaldis, tone, who, and not Rob Roy, is his predecessor in Scott’s novel to which *Catriona* is more truly a sequel than it is to *Kidnapped*. Alan Breck, too, has mellowed with time; he is not so irascible, though he is quite as resourceful, as ever. Yet when all this is allowed, the fact remains that *Catriona* is simply a successful historical romance thoroughly well mounted by a stage manager whose imaginative genius is beyond all question. Mr. Stevenson has not yet attempted to write a novel setting forth the Scotland of yesterday. So far,

at all events he has not followed in the wake of Scott whose supreme novel, *The Antiquary*, dealt with the Scotland of his yesterday.

Mr. Barrie, although he is probably even more widely read than Mr. Stevenson, has yet to prove that he is in the same rank as a novelist. He has in fact yet to prove that he can be regarded as a novelist at all. He has no doubt produced two fictions of quite the orthodox length—*When a Man's Single* and *The Little Minister*. But the first is Thrums, with a dash of 'Walker, London,' and the second is Fairyland, with a dash of Thrums. But for Thrums, neither would have the slightest chance of securing a place in the list of the very few books which have recently 'come to stay.' The London chapters in *When a Man's Single*—the chapters of which the New (and impossible) Journalist, Mr. Noble Simms, is the centre—are unmitigated farce. The Egyptian in *The Little Minister* is delightful, although some of her antics are a trifle too suggestive of the side-splitting modern comedy of the type of *Charley's Aunt* and *The Private Secretary*. But she belongs not to Scotland, but to the realm of Oberon and Titania. What is worse, she quite transforms—if she does not positively demoralise—Mr. Dishart, by attempting to graft upon him what is mere undergraduate freakishness. The Dominie, too, in his character of Enoch Arden, is too obviously a mere after-thought. He has no more connection with the Dominie who entered into the joys and sorrows of the M'Quhumpha family than has the Mrs. Dishart of the *Auld Licht Idylls* and *The Window in Thrums* with the girl whose physical attractions caught the fancy of Lord Rintoul. But when Mr. Barrie plants his foot down upon his native heath, he makes no mistakes. The earlier or Thrums chapters of *When a Man's Single* are quite as good as anything he has written, and in *The Little Minister*, Nanny Webster, Tammas Whamond, and Wearyworld the policeman, are quite worthy to be placed by the side of Leebie and Jess and Tammas Haggart. In short, Mr. Barrie has, in his two most ambitious books, made some very important additions to his Thrums gallery, but he has not demonstrated to the world that he can write a novel which can be placed beside the master-

pieces of Mr. George Meredith, or even of Mr. Thomas Hardy. As a portrait-painter, even more perhaps than as a master of humour and of pathos, he is seen at his best in *A Window in Thrums*. But it is the Scotland not of to-day, but of the day before yesterday, that he sees through the panes of that window. With his men and women of the present time—the boys and girls of his houseboats, the social butterflies of his imagination—posterity, at all events, will take but little account. But the immortality of Hendry and Jess, Leebie and Jamie, T'nowhead and Tammas Haggart, and indeed of all who sat on the pig-sty and severely criticised the occupants of the Auld Licht pulpit, is already assured. Yet it is only their gravestones that can be seen by the English pilgrims who crowd to Kirriemuir, as if it were a second Abbotsford; even the lettering on these can be deciphered only with some difficulty.

What is true of Mrs. Oliphant, Mr. Stevenson, and Mr. Barrie is equally true of the very dissimilar authors of *Kilmallie* and *Margaret Drummond*. Mr. Henry Johnston is one of the few Scottish writers of to-day of whom it may be said that they are too modest and not sufficiently prolific. His literary claims—at all events his claims as a novelist—are represented by two works, *Glenbuckie* and *Kilmallie*, which followed each other at a long interval, and which both deal with the almost uniformly still life of a Scottish country parish. By their form, rather than anything else, they recall the works of Galt, and more particularly the immortal *Annals*. But the strong point of Mr. Johnston's work is its painstaking realism. There is not one, even of his minor characters, that is not reproduced in every detail, while the clergyman who figures in and is the centre of both, is quite as life-like as the 'Little Minister,'—perhaps even more life-like, as there is nothing of the New Humour in him. No greater compliment has ever been paid to Galt than the fact that M. Angellier, by far the most eminent of foreign biographers of Burns, should have considered it part of his preliminary pioneer duty to study *The Annals of the Parish* and its companion volumes, so as to reproduce the Scotland, and, in particular, the Ayrshire, into which Burns was born. Simi-

larly, the Scottish Buckle of the future, who may seek to present country-life before and immediately after the Disruption, will find what he needs in works not of the class of Mr. Barrie's *Auld Licht Idylls* and Mr. Crockett's *Stickit Minister*, but of the class of *Glenbuckie* and *Kilmallie*. Such characters as Mysie Shaw, the spae-wife, and Peter Shale, the betheral, and above all the worthy but simple minister himself, recording all the details of his life, from the outbreak of Non-Intrusion in his parish to the eruption of measles in his manse, are obviously drawn from the life; they have, at all events, all the reality of coloured photographs. But Mr. Johnston, like his contemporaries, does not offer to reproduce the main stream of the Scottish life of to-day. His Scotland is the Scotland of the Disruption and of the periods immediately before and immediately after that event, and, as last year's celebration of the Jubilee of the Free Church demonstrated in perhaps more ways than one, that is the Scotland of yesterday. And the same thing is true of Miss Veitch, an author who writes of Scottish clerical life in a very different spirit from Mr. Johnston. The minister of Miss Veitch's latest and most powerful story, *Margaret Drummond, Millionaire*, is a narrow-minded fanatic, in whose case a hopeless and preposterous love rouses into baleful life a hereditary and homicidal madness, and of whom the best that can be said is that he has a sister who is a great deal worse than himself. Miss Veitch's dislike to bigotry makes her lapse occasionally into a positively Corinthian style, and one feels tempted every twentieth page or so to mutter for her benefit the Arnoldian watchword of 'Urbanity, Urbanity, Urbanity.' But apart from that, may it not be said with perfect safety that the miserable and hapless Mr. M'Gregor belongs to a type of clergymen that is nowhere to be found in Scotland, or at all events that lingers in some remote and inaccessible district, unmistakeably a survival of a past that was in theology a good deal more pedantic, and in religion a good deal gloomier than the present? Even the pharisaical swindler, M'Burnie, has an antiquated look, although his misdoings are tolerably modern. In other words, Miss Veitch is forced in

her latest work, as in its predecessors, to fall back for characters deserving of portraiture upon the Scotland not of to-day, but of yesterday—at the earliest. The younger writers, such as Mr. Crockett, the author of *The Stickit Minister*, Mr. William Wallace, the author of *Scotland Yesterday*, and ‘Gabriel Setoun,’ the author of *BarnCraig*, are following in the steps of their predecessors, and, in the meantime, are devoting their attention less to types of character that are with us, and likely to endure, than to types that are disappearing or have recently disappeared.

Can the reason for this declinature on the part of our novelists to deal with contemporary Scottish life be due to the fact that that life is so deficient in the elements of richness and picturesqueness as not to merit reproduction at all? If this be the truth it amounts in effect to the humiliating confession that Scotland—the Scotland of Scott and Galt and Miss Ferrier—is played out as a literary field. For the same thing cannot be said of fiction which deals with the leading phases and problems of present-day English life. Mr. George Meredith stands admittedly at the head of living authors of fiction; he is, as Mr. Conan Doyle has put it, the ‘novelist’s novelist.’ Yet his best books, such as *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, *The Egoist*, *Diana of the Crossways*, and *One of our Conquerors* deal with these phases and problems, though perhaps too much in the spirit of the man of the cloister, playing, in imagination, at being a man of the world. Next in order of merit comes Mr. Hardy. He, like Mr. Barrie, is in the habit of going to the highways and hedges, if not to the pig-sties, of life for his characters. But in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, his latest work of importance—his greatest sensation, if not his greatest success—he has set himself deliberately, and, indeed, with a too defiant audacity, to tackle one of the leading moral problems of the period. On the shoulders of Mr. W. E. Norris has fallen the mantle of Anthony Trollope,—his more fervent admirers would prefer to say of Thackeray. His style is that of Trollope, trimmed, however, to suit the present prison-crop taste in literature. And like Trollope, he sketches the men and women of his time, although he takes them

rather from the lawn-tennis ground and the sea-side promenade than, as did his predecessor, from the Bishop's study, the drawing-room of the prosperous country-town solicitor, and the parlour of the commercial traveller. Yet he receives—as indeed he deserves to receive—the steady support of the circulating libraries to an extent that is not accorded even to the high-priests of murder, mystery, and detectivism. Take again two very dissimilar works, *Dodo* and *Robert Elsmere*, which resemble each other in this, that at a bound they have reached the topmost step in the stair of popularity. The success of both is due partially—although in the case of *Robert Elsmere*, only partially—to the circumstance of their reproducing life as, in certain circles and under certain conditions, it is lived in England. *Dodo* is the most daring effort that has yet been made to reproduce realistically what used to be known as ‘the world of fashion.’ It teaches the same moral, or want of moral, as the plays of Mr. Oscar Wilde and Mr. Arthur Pinero. The strain of *Robert Elsmere* is in an infinitely higher mood than the strain of *Dodo*. Even when the Oxford Hegelianism which figures in it has gone the way of all other ‘isms,’ it will be read for its exquisite descriptions of clericalised country life in England, and more particularly in Westmoreland, and for a prose eloquence, when the higher problems of Deity and Destiny come to be treated of, which places Mrs. Humphry Ward almost, if not altogether, on the level of George Eliot. But its original success—a success almost as great as that attained by *Waverley*, by *The Pickwick Papers*, by *Vanity Fair*, and by *Adam Bede*—is due to its having given expression—passionate expression—to a number of the more remarkable aspirations of the time, and to its having reproduced, for the benefit of England at large, that Oxford which is, and seems destined ever to be, its centre of ideas. Mrs. Ward has followed up *Robert Elsmere* with *David Grieve*, in which some of the chief democratic, ethical, and artistic problems of the period are dealt with. It has unquestionably not attained the popularity secured by its predecessor. But this is the fault of Mrs. Ward, who has tried in *David Grieve* to realise certain aspects of life with which

she is obviously unfamiliar; the problems which move her almost to hysterics are themselves vital enough.

Must we then accept the humiliating conclusion that the reason why we have not to-day a Scottish fiction representing Scottish life in all its breadth, or even in such breadth as English life is represented in, say *Middlemarch* and *Robert Elsmere*, is that that life does not merit reproduction? Must we admit that, so far as the great stream of literary tendency is concerned, Scotland is indeed but the knuckle-end of England? Are none of the men and women who do the hard work, not to speak of the hard pleasure, that still is done on this side of the Tweed—who constitute whatever may be left to us of national *ingenium perfervidum*—worth portraying? Is Scotland to be nothing more than the happy hunting-ground of novelists in search of those ‘dear, queer, quaint types,’ at present being idolised by English pilgrims to Kirriemuir? Before an unhesitating negative can be given to these question, two concessions must be made. Scotland does not possess a social—to be strictly accurate, a ‘Society,’—centre like London; nor does it possess a centre of literary, ethical, and religious influence, such as Oxford is now, and such as Edinburgh was in the generation of Scott and of Jeffrey, and still more in the generation of Hume and Robertson. Scotland has been convulsed over a Robert Lee seeking to improve public worship; it never will be convulsed over even an imaginary Robert Elsmere sitting overwhelmed beneath the ruins of his creed. It would be altogether inaccurate to say that the fashionable Dodo is extinct in Scotland—and for the all-sufficient reason that she has never existed. Beyond question, a new writer of Scottish fiction, seeking above all things to traverse the main road of the national life, would labour under no slight disadvantages. The great fortresses of literature are in possession of London cliques and Oxford coteries. Any author who does not himself belong, or who has not critical friends belonging, either to the one or to the other, must have an uphill battle to fight, unless, like that great literary Umpslopogaas, Thomas Carlyle, he can fight them with such a redoubtable Axe Groanmaker as the ‘Annan-

dale vernacular ;' for at the present moment style in literature means to all intents and purposes good London or Oxford talk. Finally, those men and women who, if they are not the most interesting personages in the country, yet undoubtedly occupy the Front Benches in politics, Society, and literature, are to be found, and can, therefore, be sketched, in London alone. Lord Beaconsfield, as the author of *Endymion*, is purely a London product. Mr. Meredith may be essentially a novelist of the cloister, the chief business of whose Sir Willoughby Patternes and Lady Blandishes is, not to speak naturally, but to utter finely cut Meredithisms ; but he could not have drawn them at all if he had been in touch, or at any rate in telephonic connection, with London drawing-rooms.

But while it must be confessed that novels dealing with London and with those forces—or figureheads—of Imperial life, which are to be found there alone, can be written nowhere but in London, it by no means follows that these are the only works of fiction worth reading. As a simple matter of fact, the great majority of the novels which have become classics—almost all in fact, except one or two of the masterpieces of Dickens and Thackeray that are classics—deal with country life. This is true of the best by Miss Austen, by George Eliot, and by Mrs. Oliphant, by Scott, by Hardy, and by Blackmore. Nor should it be forgotten that latter-day improvements in railway and telegraphic communication, if they have not absolutely abolished the Cheviots, have brought London nearer even to the smaller country towns of Scotland than it was to Manchester and Liverpool fifty years ago. Even assuming that existing political arrangements remain untouched, and that nothing of a serious character is attempted in the way of what is popularly, if also vaguely, known as 'devolution,' London is destined to become more and more to the rest of the United Kingdom what 'the city' is to the West End and the middle class suburbs—a place of business and not of life. The decline of provincialism, and still more of provincality, must follow as a matter of course. And, to take the very lowest view, it follows that Scotland will share along with Lancashire, Yorkshire, and the English Mid-

lands in the benefits that are bound to flow from this decline in provinciality and the consequent growth in urbanity,—which it is to be hoped will not be even in the first instance suburbanity. When all is said and done, life in Edinburgh is a good deal more picturesque than life in Bath. There is as much energy in Glasgow as in Manchester, and the artist in words—an important person in these days when the realism of ugliness is happily giving way to the realism of beauty—cannot find in Lancashire anything comparable to that unique variety of scenery which even Scott has not exhausted, and which half a crown places in half an hour at the command of the Trongate. No doubt our country life lacks the repose that is to be found in Southern England—that repose which must ever be associated with Anglicanism, and which tempts one to say with Clough, ‘All cathedrals are Christian, all Christians are cathedrals.’ But this very repose produces monotony in life and uniformity in character. To seekers after ‘quaint types,’ Scottish country towns present more variety of life, more ‘humour’—embodied in individualities—than corresponding towns in England. Then Scotland, no less than England, has its absorbing ‘questions,’ the fire and fury—meaning very little, perhaps, but interesting enough while they last—of imperial and local politics, all indeed that constitutes the raw material of the novelist who takes a comprehensive view of life, and does not believe he has completely discharged his duty by his readers when, at the end of his third volume, he has satisfactorily disposed of Tybalt and Paris, and has established Romeo and Juliet in a house in Park Lane, bought by Mr. Montagu, and furnished by Mr. Capulet. We, as well as our neighbours, have our ‘labour problems,’ our ‘religious unrest,’ our party caucuses, our fierce competition of middle class life, our social vulgarity, and our ‘darkest Scotland.’ A Provost, painted by Galt, is more certain of immortality, because he is truer to life, than the Mayor of Casterbridge, even when painted by Mr. Hardy. The nearest approach to an ideal Scottish novel—in the sense of a novel dealing with the larger realities of Scottish life—that has recently been published is perhaps *My Ducats and my Daughter*, written by the Rev. Mr. Hay Hunter and Mr. Walter

Whyte, and which, mainly on account of the 'strength' of some of the portraits, was warmly praised by several of the leading literary journals in London. In the matter of plot, *My Ducats and my Daughter* was by no means strong. It was not quite coherent, and indeed suggested the idea that the collaboration of the authors was not so effective as it might have been, or as, say, the Erckmann-Chatrion and Besant-Rice collaborations have been in the past. But the chapters dealing with journalistic life were exceptionally clever, though a note of subacidity was observable in some passages, and, above all, the humours of an election in Scotland—an election of to-day, not of the day before yesterday—were brought out with rare skill and appreciation of the genuine characteristics of Scotsmen belonging to a certain social grade, and living in one or other of our smaller country towns. But, at the best, there was far more of promise than of performance in *My Ducats and my Daughter*, and its authors have not followed up their experiment with another venture of the same kind. The Scottish novel of the time, dealing with the Scottish life of the time, in a spirit akin to, and yet different, from the spirit of the late Mr. Laurence Lockhart and the authors of *My Ducats and my Daughter*, has yet to be written. Meanwhile, the field is partially occupied by those of the works of the writer who still elects to be known in literature by her maiden name of 'Annie S. Swan,' which set forth the modern aspect of Scottish, and especially of Scottish working-class, life. They have a popularity which is only equalled by, and can best be compared to, that attained by the novels that appear in the French *Petit Journal*. They are simple, they are wholesome, the bulk of them are 'real;' although, in one of the latest, *The Guinea Stamp*, Mrs. Burnett-Smith commits precisely the same blunder that Mrs. Humphry Ward commits in *David Grieve*—she attempts as in the chapter in which a Glasgow music hall is put upon her stage, to reproduce life with which she is obviously unfamiliar. Above all things, the novels of Mrs. Burnett-Smith, like Mr. Barrie's works, seek, in the face of a rebellion which is essentially artificial, to perpetuate the tradition and enforce the sanctions of morality based upon piety.

At the same time, it is no disrespect to Mrs. Burnett-Smith—who, by the way, seems destined to fall into Mrs. Oliphant's blunder of writing far too much, and so of doing injustice to herself—to say that the Scottish novelist of the future will work a richer vein of life and character than she has done, although it may be hoped, and indeed believed, that like her, and like Mr. Barrie, he (or more probably she) will do full justice to those so-called humble folk who are the moral aristocracy of a country that is not priest-ridden, but is, and ever will be, conscience-ridden.

But it would be idle to spend time and ink in speculating further as to the possible appearance and characteristics of 'the demi-god whom we await' in fiction. What are the differentiating features, what—which is happily the same thing—are the permanent excellences of the fiction that we actually have? One of the first stands out with special prominence. That is the growing (but only growing) tendency of the Scottish writer of fiction, due no doubt to the present day habit of reading (by preference) when running, to tell his story as directly and simply as possible. The warmest admirer of Scott, the man who is grateful to Scott for being what Carlyle, in a momentary impulse of contempt, styled him,—an intellectual *restaurateur*,—must allow that his favourite's long prefaces are intolerable, and that the majority of his digressions are unreadable. It would, of course, be sheer flippant impudence to say that 'Scott would not do in these days.' Scott was above all things a man of his time, and had he been born into ours, would have adapted himself to its necessities, and would have sought to gratify its wishes. But he lived in a time and for readers of comparative leisure; and his digressions were no more looked upon as tedious or irrelevant than were descriptions of scenery delivered by a host of the old school to a guest whom he was driving at an easy pace through a beautiful stretch of country. But a novel is, as a rule, read now-a-days as a means of getting a mental rest after hard and rapid work, or of getting rid of the tedium of a railway journey, and the novelist who aims in the first instance at popularity, has to confine himself strictly to inci-

dent and character. Novels tend more and more to resemble plays; yet the Scottish tendency to digress, to preach and to moralise, is still to be observed in some of our modern writers. Mrs. Oliphant, as a rule, tries nowadays very bravely to repress the tendency, but she occasionally yields to it. It is even more marked in Mr. Stevenson; the habit of stopping by the wayside and reflecting upon life seems, indeed, to be growing upon him. Mr. Barrie, on the other hand, has cultivated a style of demure directness; he leaves his characters almost severely alone to speak and act for themselves. Truth to tell, he does not shine as a moralist. There is a *souppçon* of Tupper in such a sentiment as, 'Let us no longer cheat our consciences by talking of filthy lucre. Money may always be a beautiful thing. It is we who make it grimy.' Again, very true but also very ineffectual is 'This family affection, how good and beautiful it is. Men and maids love, and, after many years they may rise to this. It is the grand proof of goodness in human nature, for it means that the more we see of each other the more we find that is lovable. If you would cease to dislike a man try to get nearer his heart.' Compare such very thin gruel in the way of reflection with the delightful sentence in which Mr. Barrie closes and sums up the career of one of his worthies.—'The moral of his life came in just as he was leaving it, for he rose from his death-bed to hide a whisky bottle from his wife?'

Another leading characteristic of the modern Scottish novelist is his or her inclination—amounting almost to a passion—to regard himself as above all things an artist. Mrs. Ward has spoken of the 'golden art' of Mr. Stevenson, and he himself has told the world through interviewers how hard he labours to give the crowning glory of perfection to his style. As a historical novelist, he is as truly the successor of Scott as *Kidnapped* and *Catriona* are sequels to *Rob Roy*. But he has none of the slovenliness of that busy irregular-looking man whom Carlyle saw in Edinburgh, when sorrow had ploughed lines in his face, and death had marked him for its own. It is quite true that Mr. Stevenson's work does not show the massiveness of Scott's, that he has not Scott's broad human sympathies, that his

humour, if not objective rather than subjective, is as a matter of the head and not of the heart, that while he can give us a Miss Grant or a James More, or an Alan Breck, he cannot by the mouth and the practice of a Bailie Nicol Jarvie preach the whole gospel of Scottish pawkiness—a pawkiness that has prudence for its basis, but yet has no fellowship either with cowardice or with cruelty. But to his honour be it said, Mr. Stevenson has, by his preaching and by his successful performance, driven inartistic work in Scottish fiction out of the market.

Mr. Barrie's work bears no resemblance whatever to Mr. Stevenson's. It is notable not for its style, but for its (apparent) absence of style. Mr. Barrie supplies the popular demand for 'snippets.' He has always before him the fear of the dictator of the bookstall who 'cuts the dialogue,' and 'skips the descriptions,' that he may plunge into incident, or revel in character which is revealed by humour. But although he does not, like Mr. Stevenson, wear a velvet coat openly and almost ostentatiously, Mr. Barrie is unquestionably an artist, and of a very high order. In 'interiors,' and in 'types' of 'humble life,' he is absolutely without a rival, and almost without a second, either in England or in Scotland. Apart from his humour, apart from his pathos, which in places would be almost intolerable but for the humour which shines through it, the chief figures in his gallery, Cree Queery and Mysie Drolly, Nanny Webster and Tammas Whammond, and above all Hendry and Jess and Leeby, and the son from London, are immortal; they are the perfection of subjective Teniersism—and of something more than subjective Teniersism—in Scottish fiction.

But is it quite certain that 'description' will be conspicuous by its absence from the Scottish fiction of the future? No one will say it is desirable that this should be so. Scottish scenery is still as remarkable as ever it was, as attractive to the stranger within our gates, as much of a silent and inscrutable force in the shaping of careers and in the moulding of characters. A Scottish fiction which absolutely ignores Scottish scenery, must, even though it should throb with Burnsian in-

tensity, be accounted as incomplete and artistically unsymmetrical. The word 'description' is almost certain in this connection to bring the name of Mr. William Black to the tip of the tongue. In these days when 'boom' succeeds 'boom' in literature with breathless and headachy activity, the critics of Scottish fiction have by common consent given Mr. Black a back seat. This is not very surprising. Mr. Black has himself given the critics cause to blaspheme. His latest work is not at all up to the level of his earliest. His strange (and commonplace) adventures in houseboats and elsewhere are a weariness of the flesh. But *A Daughter of Heth* is one, not only of the sweetest, but of the most artistic stories that have ever been written. The Whaup is as assured of immortality as any of the creations of Mr. Stevenson or Mr. Barrie. But Mr. Black's day—let us hope it has not quite ceased to be—was emphatically the day of 'descriptions.' He was notoriously in demand with the constituencies of the circulating libraries, because of the purple heather and other 'patches' which he deliberately made an important feature of his stories. He represented the art of Glasgow and the West of Scotland—at all events of the pre-impressionism days—projected into fiction. May it not be hoped that even if deliberate 'patch' work be a thing of the past, our novelists of the future will not quite ignore the influence of Nature upon human life and mood? Here, for instance, in the latest of Mrs. Oliphant's works, *Sir Robert's Fortune*, now running in one of the magazines, is a piece of 'description,' which is something very different from a 'patch':—

'The lingering sunset died over the moss with every shade of colour that the imagination could conceive. The heather flamed now pink, now rose, now crimson, now purple; little clouds of light detached themselves from the pageant of the sunset, and floated all over the blue, like rose leaves scattered and floating on a heavenly breeze; the air over the hills thrilled with a vibration more delicate than that of the heat, but in a similar confusion like water, above the blue edges of the mountains. Then the evening slowly dimmed, the colours going out upon the moor, tint by tint, though they still lingered in the sky; then in the east, which had grown gray and wistful, came up all at once the white glory of the moon. It was such an evening as only belongs to the North. An enchanted

hour, neither night nor day, bound by no vulgar conditions, lasting for ever, like Lily's mood, no limits or boundaries to it, floating in infinite vastness and stillness, between heaven and earth.'

Here we have a far higher and, indeed, heavenlier 'graphic' than can be found in the pages of Mr. Hardy. This passage is the accent, nay the ecstasy of Wordsworthianism—an ecstasy which it may be hoped will never desert Scottish life or Scottish fiction.

Finally, it may be claimed for the Scottish fiction of to-day that it has no fellowship with the unfruitful works of *fin de siècle* Decadence. There may be degrees of merit among our novelists, but it may be claimed for all of them—for Mrs. Oliphant as well as for Mrs. Burnett-Smith, for Mr. Stevenson no less than for Mr. Barrie—that they keep ever flying the standard of purity and simplicity. The latter-day gospels of sensuality and suicide have found no exponents on this side of the Tweed. The vehement moral sensationalism which Mr. Hardy has enunciated in his *Tess of D'Urbervilles* has made no headway with us. Mr. Stevenson is as familiar with French as with British literature. He probably knows Baudelaire and Verlaine as intimately as he knows Meredith. But he has directly protested against the 'erotic mania,' the black cloud of which would appear to be at last passing from the powerful mind of M. Zola. He places the heroine of his latest story, as has already been noted, in a position of almost Shandean difficulty; but he extricates her from it with the chivalry of a Harry Esmond or a Thomas Newcome. It would be hardly possible to exaggerate the influence for good which Mr. Black and Mr. Barrie have had upon two generations of Scotsmen and Scotswomen through their teaching by example. Scott placed the stamp of purity upon Scottish fiction, as before him Burns had placed the stamp of purity upon Scottish song. The tradition of Scott will be handed down unsullied to the latest generations.

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