

MAID MARGARET.*

Mr. Crockett has written much—very much—since his name and fame were established by "The Stickit Minister" and "The Raiders," but it is problematical that since he first appeared as a star of some magnitude on the literary horizon he has written anything more important than this his latest historical romance. As an author he is unequal: his leading defect seems to be an inability to distinguish when his own output is good and when it is not. He writes, it would seem, with vast exuberance; he has the enthusiasm of the born story-teller, and in the telling of a tale considers primarily what he is to say, not how he is to say it. His tales are spun "straight from the reel." That his cheerful boisterousness leads him into occasional lapses, cannot be gainsaid. Now and again the vigour becomes too vigorous, and what should appear as strength looks like violence. There are but few half-shades.

In "Maid Margaret of Galloway" he has found a subject that is well suited to him; and he has developed his tale of love and fighting with much skill and ingenuity. The effects are of strong lights and heavy shadows; his pictures remind one of the works of the painter Muller, Constable's disciple. The bluff, emphatic Gallovidian nature emerges from the pages, and one feels that sometimes a quieter, less harsh, note would be welcome.

The Maid of Galloway is first seen at a convent in France, and there are simultaneously introduced the three men who were her lovers, and who successively became her husband—William, eighth Earl of Douglas, his brother James, and Abbot Laurence M'Kim, son of a smith. Margaret, it is to be feared, does not impress by her constancy or by any absence of vanity. She glories in attention from men, and while she is prepared to marry William, she is equally prepared to flirt with James and the Abbot. Of Duke James a convincing and unattractive vignette is given. The sketch is characteristically Crockettian: "A big, lordly, over-lording man that loved his bellyful of lustihood—to eat when he was hungry, drink when thirst nipped him, carry off on his saddle-bow the woman who pleased him, to swagger before all men as Saul among the people, haler, heartier, stronger, taller by a head than any there—these made life for James Douglas." William, the shrewd, calculating man of schemes and plans that were to make him King of Scotland in place of James the Second, is also well drawn; and so is the childlike, but by no means childish, Abbot, whose heart is not in monastical affairs, but in the shock and turmoil of battles. Some of the descriptions of the French scenery in which the romantic maid found herself in these early days are charmingly limned. This, for example: "From the great terrace, lo! all fertile Touraine, the Garden of France—which is to say, of the world. Yonder was the green of the river banks, shining emerald through a lawn drift of peach blossom, the clearer hue of almond, the white wax of cherry and apple—on and on till the distance turned into a land of dream, or some Avalon lost among the clouds of sunset." This passage, too, has much attractiveness: "August in Galloway, May in Touraine. These are to me the height of earthly beauty, and whatever bliss can proceed from flowers and woods, from sun-speckled riverine paths and breadths of heather lands, across which great whale-backed cloud-shadows drift, lumberingly yet silently, as if they too were labouring wains drawn by the white celestial oxen." Such passages may be taken as noteworthy assets against the Gallovidian "ruggedness"—to call it nothing less polite—that figures here and there.

From France the scene is changed to Galloway, of which we have many strong impressions, and where the love tale and the tale of intrigue and bloodshed are developed with the skill of an old literary hand. Not for a moment does the story sag or flag; the art of Mr. Crockett carries the reader with ease and interest from page to page, and although the book is a long one, it is without the slightest difficulty that one goes to the end, not skipping a single page or paragraph. The thing is closely knit. A conclusion one comes to after reading "Maid Margaret of Galloway" is that Mr. Crockett may succeed to some extent in doing for Galloway what Scott did for Midlothian and other parts of Scotland. Before Scott wrote his novels, Scotland was quite outside the range of the tourist; it was

not "the fashion" to visit Scotland; so no one did visit it. Tourists to-day are part of Scotland's life-blood; but they do not visit Galloway. The writings of Mr. Crockett may be the means of changing this and directing Englishmen to what is one of the most romantic and picturesque areas in all Scotland.

It may seem unkind to conclude with a complaint, but Mr. Crockett ought to know that this kind of preface, in an "Advertisement," is out of date and tiresome: "These papers were found among the archives of —, etc., etc." The Romantic Impressionist School has too great a weakness for it.

The book is embellished by distinguished full-page wash-drawings by Mr. Seymour Lucas—who ought not, however, to have drawn on the lineaments of Mr. George Bernard Shaw for a portrait of the smith M'Kim.

DAVID HODGE.

"CANADA'S 'NEVER, NEVER, NEVER LAND.'"

It comes with almost a shock to the ordinary man to discover that there are in Canada vast tracts of unknown territory, regions mapped only by hearsay, whose mountains are unnamed and whose plains are trodden only by the moose. How many people could say offhand, except in the vaguest way, where Labrador is? To most people it is a mere name, a splodge on the map, and nothing more. In point of fact, it was, and for the most part still is, an unknown land. The intrepid Hudson's Bay trappers have never penetrated beyond the outermost fringe, and the expedition, which Mr. Wallace describes in what is one of the most impressive travel books ever published, was the first real attempt to unveil the mysteries of this frost-bound wilderness.

There are times when a bald statement of fact appeals to the imagination more forcibly than the most finished literary art. The lifeboat coxswain who said "the Caister men never turn back" thrilled Englishmen by a simple statement of what was to him a very ordinary fact. In the same way Mr. Wallace stirs the blood by his artless narrative of the heroic struggle of two young Americans in the face of overwhelming difficulties. In a sense the expedition was a failure. The explorers never reached their goal. Mr. Wallace was saved only by a miracle, and Mr. Hubbard, the leader of the expedition, died on the return journey. From the utilitarian point of view such expeditions seem merely useless—a waste of valuable lives. But so long as man retains sufficient of the original savage to appreciate indomitable pluck, there will be few whose imagination will not be quickened, whose pulse will not respond to the story of the first ascent of the Matterhorn or the first attempt to pierce the wilds of Labrador. The expedition was foolhardy and rash, and it is easy, after the event, to point to obvious precautions which were neglected. But while we cannot agree with Mr. Wallace in his chivalrous attempt to shield his dead friend from the charge of foolhardiness, we cannot but admire the superb and reckless daring of these pioneers. Mr. Hubbard was constantly quoting Kipling's noble poem, "The Explorer." It was his inspiration while he lived; it is his justification now that he is dead. He was the very embodiment of the spirit of the poem. He indeed heard the call—

"Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the Ranges—
Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for you.
Go!"

The call was answered, as it has been answered before and will be answered again; but never was it answered with more self-sacrifice or more unquestioning devotion.

It is impossible here to summarise the story of the journey, or to do more than indicate the difficulties which beset the two pioneers and the half-breed Cree Indian who was their guide, and of whom it is enough to say that he proved himself more than worthy of his companions. The main difficulty was to obtain food. Game is scarce in Labrador, and the explorers were unfortunate in chancing upon an exceptionally lean year. Had it been otherwise—but the odds against them were so tremendous that it is idle to speculate on what might have been. It is enough to say that Hubbard died of starvation, and that Mr. Wallace was only saved by his superior physique.

* "Maid Margaret of Galloway." By S. R. Crockett. 6s. (Hodder and Stoughton.)

* "The Lure of the Labrador Wild." By Dillon Wallace. 6s. (Hodder and Stoughton.)