

better than a good many more pretentious stories. The writer has evidently put some genuine energy into her work, and one can only regret that a want of literary skill has prevented her from making anything very attractive out of her materials. The motive of the story is that a man cursed with a bad wife, who deserts him and goes into a convent, falls in love with a girl who adores him. This is not a bad foundation for a novel, and it is creditable to Mrs. Mayne Reid that she makes the man behave passably well in the circumstances, and still contrives to keep up some interest in his doings.

An Earthly Fulfilment. By John Reay Watson. (Fisher Unwin.)

If the author of 'An Earthly Fulfilment' has won any reputation in the field of fiction—and sundry quotations from reviews would make it appear so—this story will not tend to the increase or justification of it. The perusal of the book, however it is effected, is a wearisome task. If it is read aloud, the sound of inept and unhappy phrasing annoys the ear; if it is coned in silence, the attention wanders. It is often hard to say what it is all about, but rather because of poverty of expression and matter than any subtlety. To speak frankly, it is even more tiresome than it is unintelligible. When some one, referring to the sentiments or conduct of herself or another, exclaims, "What a tangle it all is!" the reader sighs in unison. If to extricate the leading motive is difficult, it is still harder to guess at the reasons for any particular point of conduct in the actors. They go through phases of remorse, anger, tearful repining, and the rest of the gamut, but the cause of these emotions is obscure. Of love, or what stands for it, there is something. One is told of illicit passion between two or three persons belonging to a group of dreary Scotch Presbyterians in Australia. A moral, or perhaps immoral, storm in a teacup runs its course throughout the pages. The most conscientious or sympathetic reader could not feel real interest in the issues involved in it. Half a dozen families live and move and have such being as is accorded them in a singularly depressing corner of earth. Sunday-school teaching, weekday belittling of neighbours, and underhand love-making are the chief occupations. Some portentous difference in their social status is hinted at, and bulks heavily on the horizon, yet it fails to impress one with the smallest sense of importance. Every actor in the trivial drama is as locally flavoured, vulgar, and commonplace as his neighbour. But the author evidently views them from quite another standpoint. He dwells much on the variations of blood, pulse, and temperature to which they are subject; nothing is spared in the way of faintings, thrillings, and tremblings. The story ends with the suicide of a child of tender years in circumstances which, at any rate, prove the extraordinary inefficiency of those in charge of her. The real situations the author may be supposed to have prepared are left to take care of themselves. Though, in a sense, the end is no end, it is not unwelcome, since it serves its turn as such.

HISTORICAL ROMANCES.

The Black Douglas. By S. R. Crockett. (Smith, Elder & Co.)—The judicial murder of the two young Douglasses, William, sixth earl, and his brother David, by Crichton and Livingstone in 1440, and the period of James with the Fiery Face, especially in its early days, are tempting ground for the historical novelist. Mr. Crockett has realized this, but he has gone to the extreme in poetic licence. The ill-starred William was only fifteen or sixteen when he died, and, having been knighted at the age of five, was already married at the time of his early death. His wife was Janet or Margaret Lindsay, daughter of the second Earl of Crawford, and has given Mr. Crockett the idea of his heroine Maude Lindesay, adored by the gallant Sholto MacKim. The introduction of Sybilla de Thours does not fall easily into the earl's environment as we know it; but a more audacious conception is the appearance of De Retz as ambassador from France. There are few vernacular lapses in Mr. Crockett's diction. "Wage" for *wages* is a solecism we suppose incorrigible at this day. "Go his own gait" we object to because it spoils the sense. A man is told to go his own "gate" or road, not his own pace. "Tis a contract too great for one poor maid" is an utterance one would expect from a fair American, not from a high-born maid of France in the fifteenth century. The introduction of supernatural machinery is not unjustified by precedent; but there is obvious exaggeration in the fiendish figure of Gilles de Retz, with his devil-worship, his she-wolf, his baths of blood, and his nameless debaucheries. Still, some wholesome and stirring chapters—notably that entitled "Betrayed by a Kiss"—remind the critic of Mr. Crockett's earlier "form."

The invention of anything like convincing detail for the imaginary characters, since it is not usual for the chief people of the time to figure in the foreground of historical romance, is the great difficulty. We cannot say that Mr. Edgar Maurice Smith in his *Anerostes the Gaul* (Fisher Unwin) has overcome it. He calls his book "a fragment of the Second Punic War," and a very small fragment it is, as it does not cover more than the taking of Taurasia by Hannibal's army just after passing the Alps. Instead of incident the writer cultivates a fine vein of descriptive style and the split infinitive, which things do not in themselves satisfy us. What story there is is fairly interesting, but nothing out of the common, and the snapshot style of paragraph is overdone.

In *Many Ways of Love, a Romance of the Court of Catherine the Great* (Dent & Co.), Mr. Frederick Whishaw, who has on previous occasions handled Russian subjects, writes the autobiography of an imaginary German lady, Elsa von Adlerberg. She is supposed to have been born at Zerbst, where Catherine herself first saw the light. Many historical figures are brought on the scene, including the Empress Elizabeth and the miserable Peter III. The narrator, after having spent some years at the Court of Catherine, leaves Russia with her husband, Douglas von Doppelheim, who is described as a German of Scotch extraction, and great-nephew of the renowned Patrick Gordon. Mr. Whishaw knows Russia well enough to be accurate in his descriptions, and has read his history carefully. But we cannot imagine Douglas telling Catherine that he knew she was guilty of her husband's death, and "that he would sooner starve in an honest court or in no court than live and grow fat in the service of a murderer." When Mr. Whishaw talks on p. 11 of the "erlking's myrmidons," he should remember that the erlking was not introduced into German folk-lore till long after the period of his tale. There never was such a king even in fairy tales; the name arose from a misreading of "elfking," just as the Lorelei was invented by Clemens Brentano at the beginning

of the century. Mr. Whishaw's tale is highly readable.

OUR LIBRARY TABLE.

MESSRS. SMITH & ELDER have sent us *The Etchingham Letters*, by Mrs. Fuller Maitland and Sir Frederick Pollock. Sir Richard Etchingham was a retired Indian civilian who lived at the family estate in the country with his daughter Margaret—thence he exchanges the letters of which this book consists with his sister Elizabeth, who lives in London with her stepmother; they talk to one another about their books and their pursuits, and about the little love affairs which are blossoming around them with extraordinary profusion. The book is charming as a revelation of the character of the two delightful people who realize that their own life is done as far as feeling new emotions and new love is concerned, but are still young enough to enter into the lives of the younger people who surround them. Elizabeth has lost a lover whom she will ever mourn, and Sir Richard a wife, but they waste not their energies in hopeless and inactive brooding—their grief has made them mellow and given them a better taste for the fine things of life. The story in the book is slight; the interest lies entirely in the witty and wise remarks which the brother and sister make about the people whose love affairs they chronicle. The only fault that can be found with the book is that sometimes the letters, delightful as they are, almost trespass on the dangerous ground of preciosity—more so in the case of Elizabeth's letters than of Sir Richard's; but that is not a very grave fault, as it throws into better relief the strength and trustworthiness of the brother, who can be short and to the point when it is felt that a straightforward style is wanted. The method of collaboration here adopted seems a new, and is certainly a highly successful experiment, as a most genuine air is imparted to the brotherly and sisterly confidences of Sir Richard and Elizabeth by the device of the two authors exchanging letters in these characters.

MESSRS. JAMES MACLEHOSE & SONS publish *The Life of Prince Bismarck*, by Mr. William Jacks, a volume which may find admirers in Germany, but which, in spite of its pleasant style, its consistent point of view, and its illustrations, will not tempt many Englishmen to reject for it either Busch's volumes or those of the Prince himself. In his preface the author tells us that the statements in Busch's last book on Bismarck "are surrounded with such probable improbabilities that few people, I should think, will care to preserve it as a credible record of his great life." *The Athenæum* said of that book that it was one of the most interesting, remarkable, and valuable that had ever appeared; and we believe that this, rather than the opinion of Mr. Jacks, will be the verdict of history upon it. The *Life* before us is, from the point of view of politics and history, in fact an expurgated *Life*, more Bismarckian than Bismarck, and in its most essential points a travesty of history, although the author evidently firmly believes in the doctrines which he teaches. His view of the Hohenzollern candidature is that it was only a pretext of the Empress of the French and "the Jesuit agents in all Roman Catholic Courts" for a war long since resolved upon—that Beust had suggested a course, "viz., to declare war on a question of succession to a throne; and this pretext was soon found. The Spanish Government . . . had . . . fixed upon Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern. It was universally felt that no better choice could have been made." It is true that on the next page Mr. Jacks shows that he has an inkling of the truth by adding, "Besides, the negotiations with this Prince had been long known to the French Government, who, had it [sic] not pleased them, could have stopped it." Now the undoubted fact—long disputed, but now admitted on all sides, and