

NEW NOVELS.

Audrey. By Mary Johnston. (Constable.)

THE scene of Miss Johnston's romance is laid in America before the War of Independence, a favourite place and time with novelists just now, and the manners and customs of the early eighteenth century are reproduced, if not with "slavish accuracy," still without any evident anachronisms. The hero, who is a Virginian proprietor and also a London exquisite, has a charm of his own, and so has Audrey, the humble woodsman's daughter, to whom, by a singular accident, he stands in the position of guardian. But they are both the kind of people whom we expect to meet in the pages of romance and nowhere else. Some of the minor characters are drawn with more reality. It is a pity that this graceful and pleasing story should be unnecessarily marred by a conventional and melodramatic ending, especially as it has the rare merit of possessing a plot which, at least in its commencement, is original. It is one of the good things we have had from America recently.

The Dark o' the Moon. By S. R. Crockett. (Macmillan & Co.)

MR. CROCKETT has found again in this sequel to 'The Raiders' the inspiration which grey Galloway gives him with its hills and woods and floods. His descriptions of sky and landscape are always in harmony with the action of the story, which turns on a capture once more, only of hero this time instead of heroine. As to characterization, the author has seldom marked a better contrast than that between Hector Faa, the gipsy brigand, whose ignoble acts of fraud and force are just extenuated by his sincerity in the elemental beliefs of his race, and Austin Tredennis, the middle-aged captain in "Ligonier's," a veteran in war and neophyte in love, whose honest heart wins an audacious and unconventional girl. Mr. Crockett has generally proved successful in this type of warm-hearted hoiden, but in Joyce, the supposed daughter of Hector Faa, we think he has reached a higher plane and created a memorable figure. Her lover is a little commonplace, indeed boring at times. As a small point, we would submit a doubt as to Mr. Crockett's law with regard to the English peerage of Tredennis—that is, if we understand his theory of its devolution; and we are certain that "Captain Dick" did not become "the Lady Marion" on marrying her knight. Mr. Crockett delays the progress of the story unduly with explanations and hints from the narrator.

Captain Ravenshaw. By Robert Neilson Stephens. (Ward, Lock & Co.)

ELIZABETHAN London furnishes Mr. Stephens with matter for a story of adventures so adventurous that the reader is surfeited too soon. It makes one recall the motto inscribed on the house of Jacques Cœur at Bourges, "A cœur vaillant rien impossible." But though in a story of adventure nothing is impossible, one would rather that things did not seem so easy. Prejudice, too, is against the whitewashing of a rascal. It annoys one that the rascal should win the

heroine and to be told that after all he was a gentleman. It is almost an insult to one's common sense. If he was a gentleman, why did not he behave like one? It is all very well to be told that a rollicking, roistering rascal was not really such a bad sort of blackguard after all, but it is not very interesting. One does not, however, wish to take Mr. Stephens too seriously. He tells his story with spirit, and he has taken pains in dealing with Elizabethan London.

Mistress Barbara Cunliffe. By Halliwell Sutcliffe. (Fisher Unwin.)

MR. SUTCLIFFE has dated his new story nearly a hundred years ago, when the overseer's lash still swung in the mills, and children of six years old were made to work eighteen hours out of the twenty-four. But the revolt against such atrocities was beginning to make itself felt, and the picture is not all a grim one. Indeed, the combers, as well as the agriculturists upon the Yorkshire and Lancashire moors, seem to have been on the whole a cheerful race, and in Mr. Sutcliffe they have found an able and sympathetic exponent. The contempt felt by the land for trade is forcibly expressed in the strenuous character of Stephen Royd, himself the one straight-dealing millowner of the neighbourhood. For Royd is by birth a country gentleman, driven by the hard living of his forefathers to soil his hands in trade in order to redeem the paternal acres. The story which centres round this man's love for Barbara and his ambition to return to the land is inordinately long, but interesting, and not without dramatic elements, notably that of Squire Cunliffe's secret. The latter and Parson Horrocks are pleasant specimens of an old-world chivalry, while Tim o' Tabs, the irreclaimable poacher, and his light-hearted sentiments, afford welcome relief to a certain heaviness of manner from which the author, in his anxiety to impress his readers with local colour, can seldom free himself.

John Lott's Alice. By Frances G. Burmester. (Grant Richards.)

OF the many classes into which novels are divisible that which may be called the fiction of localities has during recent years become one of the most remarkable. Mr. Thomas Hardy with his Wessex—for the Wessex of fiction is more familiar than the Wessex of the Heptarchy—will occur to most readers as a leading exponent. A notable essay in this branch of fiction is this story. We have not before met with Miss Burmester's work, but there is a maturity, a sureness of touch, about 'John Lott's Alice' that might well be the result of experience. The story is sad-toned as a grey day on the Essex marshes, about which most of its scenes are played, but the consistently drawn characters are such that their story could have been no brighter. There are varied chapters even in the short and simple annals of the poor, and though Miss Burmester has chosen some of the more serious, she has presented them with unusual ability. The story deals with the loosening by simple circumstances of the moral fibre in two widely different men—John Lott, the labourer, trusted over-much by his absent employer, and Benjamin Field, the

Methodist farmer-preacher; the former cheats his master, and Field, becoming aware of it, uses the labourer as a tool for his own money-making ends, for he has misappropriated the funds of a local benefit society of which he is the only educated member. The two men are ably presented, and their development indicated with some subtlety. Alice, Lott's second wife, who is at once the means of her husband's rehabilitation and of Field's downfall, is a remarkable character. We are haunted by the scenes in which her child dies, and in which she makes her statement at the revivalist meeting. It is a story remarkable for its characterization, and for the most part well written, although the author occasionally uses "who" for whom. If 'John Lott's Alice' be the author's first book, it is such an excellent first as we rarely encounter.

The Assassins. By Nevill M. Meakin. (Heinemann.)

THIS romance is as full of faults as a generous wine of Burgundy is full of warmth. But it is romance. Here are all the errors of style and of judgment which one associates with an author's first book and with youth. But they are all errors on the generous, impulsive side, of hot blood, swift movement, exaggeration, and display; errors over which even the hypercritical may smile rather than frown, with good-humoured deprecation, and without annoyance. One fancies that the writer sows his literary wild oats here; and they are a hopeful crop. In the world of fiction, at all events, we live in an age of over-sophistication, a period of attenuation born of wide-spread but superficial education. There is nothing in the least attenuated about 'The Assassins.' The author's choice of subject, apart from other signs, suffices to ensure him against any accusations of timidity. The story deals with the wars of the Crusades. French Philip, English Richard of the Lion Heart, the Saladin—these and other great figures of history and romance are here dealt with in familiar fashion. But the author's achievement (dotted over as it is with faults and inaccuracies) justifies his daring. The story moves exclusively in the East, and is concerned with Mussulmen rather than with the Western horde. Yet the writer betrays no personal knowledge of the East, and is certainly not familiar with Mohammedan peoples, their faith, or their customs; that he shows upon every page. He is one of those for whom close first-hand study of material might lessen considerably the dash and glitter which constitute the interest—the fascination, one might almost say—of their work. Nevertheless, in a second edition of the present story, or in his next book, the author should be at some pains to amend his construction of sentences. The style also might be improved. "Thou art afraid." "Thou triflest to gain time to befool me." "Thou meanest." One wearies of that sort of diction. The story is well worth reading as it stands, and is a good promise for better things.