

A Book of the Week.

"ACROSS AN ULSTER BOG."*

MRS. HAMILTON evidently knows Ireland very intimately, and her descriptions of the peculiar characteristics of its climate and its inhabitants are in consequence most readable. Some weeks ago I reviewed her last publication, "A Self-Denying Ordinance," in these pages. "Across An Ulster Bog" is not so absorbing a story, nevertheless it is more artistic in construction, and it is better written. The characters about whom the tale is told are all natives to the soil, and the life in their half-built huts shared with their chickens and pigs makes them so self-absorbed that they invariably speak of the dwellers in the next village, though only ten miles distant, as "foreigners." Lindsay lives alone with his daughter Ellen, who minds the house for him, and is a pretty pleasant-mannered girl. In spite of poverty and much consequent discomfort, life is fairly smooth for the father and his daughter, but alas, the serpent in this lowly paradise appears in the shape of the Protestant parson, who seduces the unfortunate girl, and ruins her reputation among the moral Irish inhabitants of the Ulster Bog. This is seemingly a very simple and common-place story, but the quality of the book consists in the wonderfully life-like pictures of Irish peasant life, and in the description of the character of Mr. Duffin, the young minister of the Gospel and the betrayer of poor Ellen's innocence. Mr. Duffin was very lonely, and his story gives yet one more illustration of the profound truth of the homely proverb that "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do." Samuel Duffin was the son of a farmer in the South of Ireland, and was imbued with the ambition to become "a gentleman." In the hope of realizing this ideal he separated himself from his friends, passed with credit through the Divinity school in Trinity College, Dublin, and after two years of life as a curate, was appointed to the living of Ballyturbet, where "as rector of the place he held a position that could not be ignored." The history of his struggles to associate intimately with the upper classes of his neighbourhood, and his reluctance to associate with the small farmers who would gladly have welcomed him as their guest, is a dismal record of futile effort and disappointed ambition, and so it came about "that he lived apart from all classes, and the life was a terribly lonely one." His only servant (a legacy from the late incumbent whom he considered himself bound to retain), was a terrible old tyrant, garrulous and a drunkard, meddlesome, dirty, and in fact a type of the very worst kind of Irish woman-servant. Mrs. Hamilton ends a chapter (telling of his constant disappointment and the daily snubbing of the girls belonging to that circle of a society of which he was so fain to call himself a member) with these words:—

"To be outside seemed his place always—out of all cheerfulness and companionship—solitary always. It did not occur to him to wonder if it was in part his own fault. 'Curse it!' he said, between his teeth."

Mr. Duffin, finding himself thus forlorn in Ballyturbet, looks around for consolation, and finds it in

the admiring glances and smiles of Ellen, with disastrous results to Ellen and with death to himself. Once, after an interview with Ellen, he nearly repents and promises to marry her the following day at a registry office at the nearest town; poor Ellen; however, waits for her bridegroom in vain, for just after he had promised to repair his fault to her as far as he was able, he receives an invitation to dinner from a local magnate, and all his good resolutions fade away, and he postpones and procrastinates till it is too late, and Ellen's child is born. It is impossible not to feel a little glad when the "lads" of the village discover by accident (for poor Ellen refused all revelations) his crime, and take vengeance upon him for the undoing of their sister and kinswoman. It is a testimony to the vitality of this vigorous little tale of Irish peasant life that the reader should rejoice in the punishment of the man, and sorrow over the misery of his poor girl victim, for in these days the public is somewhat surfeited with tales of "man the betrayer" and "woman the victim." The misery of poor Ellen is related in the following pathetic words:—

"It was unbearable—unbearable. She was a wicked girl, and God punished the wicked; but she would be good—so very good—if she could have another chance; she had been such a child and so foolish before. Was it just to let her spoil her whole life before she understood what she was doing? Was it just to leave her hopeless at sixteen? And all she wanted must be such a little thing to God—just one more chance."

Marcus Aurelius, the great Roman Emperor and philosopher, told men to so live their lives that men should be glad that they had lived. After reading a story like this, all mothers will be constrained to add an extra petition for their sons, "And no woman ever regret it!"

Bookland.

WHAT TO READ.

- "Pope Leo XIII.," by Justin McCarthy. (Bliss, Sands and Foster.)
- "The Higher Teaching of Shakespeare," by Louis H. Victory. (Eliot Stock.)
- "The Story of Sir Walter Scott's First Love," by Adam Scott. (Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace.)
- "Madame Roland," by Ida M. Tarbell. (Laurence and Bullen.)
- "The Downfall of Prempeh," by Lieut-Col. R. S. S. Baden-Powell. (Methuen & Co.)
- "The Present Evolution of Man," by G. Archdall Reid. (An important work on the theory of heredity and other aspects of the science of evolution.)
- "Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum," by Robert R. Dolling. ((Swan Sonnenschein & Co.)
- "Behind the Magic Mirror," by Olive Birrell. (Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.)
- "The World and a Man," by "Z. Z." (A realistic novel of great power.)
- "On the Verge," by Francis Prevost. (A collection of charming short stories.)
- "My Little Lady Anne," by Mrs. Egerton Castle. (A gracefully written, old-fashioned story, ending in a tragedy.)

* "Across an Ulster Bog," by M. Hamilton, author of "A Self-denying Ordinance. The Pioneer Series. 2s. 6d. net. (Heinemann, 1896.)

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