

correct the wrongs of woman than to waste time in fighting for her rights. This argument will scarcely commend itself to those who have learnt that the fundamental principle of good surgery is to go to the root of the trouble and excise that, not to put a healing ointment on the superficial sore.

The action of Miss Northam, the daughter of a Californian millionaire, in adopting the stage as her vocation, is causing considerable comment in the American Press. Miss Northam herself, states that she has "vegetated in Society, and got such a sickening of it that her soul revolted." With regard to "temptations," she says she has not experienced nearly so many in her stage life as at her father's "pink teas, yellow luncheons, and crushed strawberry dinners."

A writer in the *Queen* suggests that there is an opening for English girls who have not qualified themselves to earn their living, and are obliged to do so, as children's nurses in Northern India. The demand for English nurses is great, and the supply quite inadequate. At the same time, the disadvantages which are enumerated, are, we think, sufficient to make most English girls think twice before they elect to seek their fortunes over the seas. The probable salary which an English girl would command would be about £20 to £24 a year. The position is a lonely one. She could no more in India, than in England, expect to associate on equal terms with her employer's circle, which would probably represent all the gentlefolk in the station. She would have most or all of her meals with the children alone. She would be debarred from the sergeants' and volunteers' balls and entertainments to which the ordinary nurse is invited. She might find it a trial to see her employer go to garden parties, and gymkhanas, and dinners, and dances, while she was condemned to a monotonous round of duty with the children. She would have to find out by actual experiments whether she liked the camp life which certain officers lead for several months in the year, which some women loathe, and others extol as the most perfect existence. We do not think the prospect is sufficiently alluring to render it likely or advisable for many girls to make their way out to India, for the purpose of finding a situation such as is described.

A Book of the Week.

"TALES OF TRAIL AND TOWN."*

THERE never has been a writer quite like Bret Harte. Many people may have in their minds at this moment the remembrance of their feelings when first they took up and read "The Luck of Roaring Camp," or "Tennessee's Pardner."

It was new ground then—the new literature of a new country—and its enchanting novelty acted like a spell; the stories were so fascinating that it was not quite possible to judge them dispassionately. Now, after

the lapse of years, after the advent of a Rudyard Kipling, do these Californian stories stand the test? The answer, I think, is, and must be, "Yes." There is a quality in the work of this author which is unique, a flavour which renders the most ordinary episode delightful as he relates it, and a power to describe intelligibly the most mixed and complicated sensations, and emotions, which is genius.

The new volume contains all these qualities in unimpaired freshness. They are all examples of the art of the narrator carried to perfection. The story itself is the weak point in one or two of them, which seem to have been introduced simply to fill the volume to the size demanded by the publishers, but the first and longest of the collection, "The ancestors of Peter Atherly," is full of all Bret Harte's characteristic excellencies, including the total unpreparedness of the reader for the *dénouement*, which yet, when it comes, is felt to be the one artistic conclusion.

One wonderful touch occurs in the death-scene of Peter's mother—the widow who, in days gone by, brought up her twin children and did the washing for the frontiersmen of "Rough and Ready." She drinks herself to death—"had been, for the last two years, an inmate of a private asylum for inebriates, through certain habits contracted while washing for the camp in the first year of her widowhood." There has always been a curious lack of sympathy between her and her successful son, who supports her in luxury, but despises her low weakness. On her death-bed he gathers, from some broken ravings of hers, that his English father was a man of birth, but, in the midst of the interesting revelations, the woman loses consciousness.

"Is she dying—can't you bring her to?" said the anxious Peter, "if only for a moment, doctor."

"I'm thinking," said the visiting doctor, an old Scotch army surgeon, looking at the rich Mr. Atherly with cool professional contempt, "that your mother willna do any more washing for me as in the old time, nor give up her life again to support her bairns. And it eesna my intention to bring her back to pain for the purposes of general conversation."

"Two Americans" is charming, but it might possibly have been written by somebody else. Not so "The Judgment of Bolinas Plains." In this story, the stage, and the people who move upon it, are both equally exclusively the property of the author. This tale, too, gives a vivid example of the trait mentioned above, namely, the ability to make obscure or mixed motives clearly comprehensible to the mind of the reader. The study of Ira Beasley is as fine as anything in the Bret Harte *répertoire*.

"Alkali Dick" is a curious story, a story that nobody else would have succeeded in making possible. It is very reticent, and the only possible clue to the charming mystery of it is the signature of the curious letter written by Dick to the young Countess, and then torn up. "Richard Fontaines" may conceivably have been in reality the descendant of Armand de Fontanelles; and doubtless this is what the author intended to suggest. The one word of French which occurs to the mind of the supposed spectre—"Perdu!"—is an extremely happy thought; its natural effect upon the terrified girl is easily to be supposed.

In "A Night on the Divide" one is badly in want of a little more time in which to make the particularly charming hero's acquaintance.

G. M. R.

* "Tales of Trail and Town." By Bret Harte. Chatto & Windus.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)