

A Book of the Week.**A. STATE SECRET.***

The title story of this collection of short tales by a charming writer is by no means the best. It is pretty and tender, but not so convincing as the tales of the Irish peasantry whom Mrs. Croker understands so well. Two of these stories, called "The Little Blue Jug" and "Lady Mary Slattery," contain the elements of tragedy, and are worthy of sincere commendation. In the former, old Martin, an Irish peasant, returned to the land of his birth after an exile in America, becomes possessed of the land hunger which is a race characteristic, and is entirely dominated by the desire to purchase the little bit of land upon which the old cabin stood and where he was born. To this end he pinches and saves, to this end the tavern knows him not, and he gets the name of the savingest man in the district. His hiding-place for his treasure, accumulated in one pound notes, is a little narrow-necked blue jug, which his prying daughter-in-law never dreams of as being the receptacle for the wealth which all guess him to possess. The story tells how, when his hoard is complete, he goes out to take a party of English visitors a two days boating expedition—his last bit of hard work it is to be—and how two American ladies, coming to the cottage, see and admire the little blue jug, and buy it of the daughter-in-law; and of the old man's wild bereavement when he returns. It makes one's heart ache.

"Lady Mary Slattery" tells of tragedy of another kind. The narrator meets an old man idling about a ruined gateway, and is told the story of an English noble who took the charming little place for a prolonged honeymoon with his lovely and beloved young wife; of how the wife died in giving birth to a daughter; of how the broken-hearted father put the child out to nurse with a peasant, and went away to England; of how word was sent to him that his child, too, was dead; and of how, in her old age, the foster-nurse cried out that she was a wicked woman, that it was her own child which had died, and been sent to England in a grand white and silver coffin, and that Mary, now married to one Slattery, and the mother of four pretty untidy children, was the true daughter of Lord Mortimer. Nobody believed the story, least of all Mary herself, who was entirely scornful of the idea, but the old man who remembered the girl's mother, saw the astonishing likeness, the burnished coppery hair, the small features, the eyes, so unlike those of a Kerry peasant. The manners too, were completely different. Unconsciously to them both, Mary expects her husband to wait upon her, and he does so. The manners of the children are not like those of the surrounding cottage bantlings. Well! There it is. Whose place is it to interfere? The stranger who hears all this does not think he would be justified in hurling this bombshell into the Mortimer camp. Was his silence right or wrong? Mary would never have been happy in her altered circumstances. Ah, but Mary had sons; fine boys who would get no bringing-up in her present condition. Was the stranger right or wrong in keeping silence? He had no proof, the old foster-mother was dead, and had left behind no record of her fraud. But should he not have eased his conscience by taking what he knew to the

* By Mrs. B. M. Croker. (Methuen.)

Mortimers, telling them the facts, and letting them act as seemed best?

Thoughts such as these are stirred in the mind by the simply told tale which involves such great issues.

The collection includes one very blood-curdling ghost story, which I remember to have read before, in some magazine. It is distinctly clever, but unsatisfactory.

"Incognito" and the "Glen Lammie Shooting" are extremely amusing and the book ends with another little tragedy, most impressive—"The Proud Girl," which makes the very heart ache. A charming little collection. G. M. R.

Verses.**MARCH.**

Ho oho—
Out, flowers, and show
The manner of your mettle!
The time is here for wakening,
Put out your pricks, make sharp your sting,
Tall thistle and stout nettle!
You cuckoo-flowers and lady smocks
Come out in white and lilac frocks,
Come, steal a march on yonder phlox
And all the tribe of hollyhocks
So silken soft of petal.

Ho, oho!
Away I blow
The almond that would linger:
I pluck the snowdrops in a sheaf,
And snap the crocus, stalk and leaf,
Between my thumb and finger.
I blow my horn and down the hills
There runs a troop of daffodils,
The flagflower to my music thrills
As June commands syringa.

Ho, oho!
The squirrels know,
And from their dens come leaping,
The dormouse from his sleeping
Wakes in his house below.
The larches dress themselves in green,
The bæches stand up brown between,
The birches to my summons lean,
The cherry-tree's ablown.

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NORA HOPPER.

What to Read.

- "Efficiency and Empire." By Arnold White.
- "John Knox." By Marion Harland.
- "Shakespeare's Family: With some account of the Ardens." By Mrs. C. C. Stopes.
- "Highlands of Asiatic Turkey." By Earl Percy, M.P.
- "Princes and Poisoners: Studies of the Court of Louis XIV." By Frantz Funck-Brentano.
- "Babs the Impossible." By Sarah Grand.
- "The Crimson Weed." By Christopher St. John.
- "Anne Mainwaring." By Alice Ridley.

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