

## A Book of the Week.

### "THE VULTURES."\*

That a diplomat should not fall in love; but that, if he does, he should act as if it had not happened, is the moral of this book.

Mr. Merriman, in accordance with his late custom, has visited yet another European country with the idea of forcing it to yield him a novel, as a return, presumably, for his kindness in visiting it.

This method does not seem to produce satisfactory books. There is a lack of spontaneity about it. It suggests the idea that the novelist enjoys travel, and pays his expenses by preparing a repast for his readers, "à l'Espagnolle" or "à la Polonoise," as the case may be.

And in the "Velvet Glove" we really had enough, for the present, of Mr. Merriman's monosyllabic hero. However, he appears again in the present book, and, to aggravate the grievance, he never speaks without the author reminding us, in one phrase or another, that he is a man of few words.

The Vultures are members of the secret service of their various governments, sent about to the places where things are expected to happen. The exact status of these gentlemen is a little bewildering to the lay mind; but doubtless Mr. Merriman has learnt up his diplomacy, and is not mistaken in thinking that successful detectives are made into ambassadors and viceroys by their grateful Government. It is also a puzzle to the mere reviewer to know precisely why the detective of the British Government should make it his business to inform the Russian Government that certain Polish nobles were smuggling arms into the country. The author certainly leads us to infer that the man of few words did this; which would seem to some minds a piece of needless interference in behalf of a nation which seems well calculated to look after her own affairs in Poland and elsewhere.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the book is that which treats of the assassination of the Czar Alexander II. The whole account of this horrible nightmare of ingratitude and treachery is full of dignity and cuts into the mind, as it is meant to do, a sharply-edged outline of the whole tragedy.

"One man alone stood with folded arms, hat on head, and watched the Czar. He was on the pavement, with his back to the iron gate leading to the canal. The pavement was not six feet wide, and the Czar came along it towards him. For a moment they faced each other. Then the freed son of the serf raised both hands and threw his missile on the stones between them—at the feet of the man who had cut the chains of his slavery.

It was the serf who shrieked. The Emperor uttered no plaint. A puff of grey-white smoke rose to heaven. And those who watch there no doubt took note of it.

A shower of snow and human débris was thrown into the air. The very stones of the pavement were displaced.

The Emperor was on the ground against the railings. He was blind. One leg was gone, the other torn and mutilated to the hip. It was pitiful. He uttered no sound, but sought to move his bare limbs on the snow.

\* By Henry Seton Merriman. Smith, Elder, and Co.

This was the end—the payment! He had discharged his debt without a murmur. He had done the right—against the counsel of the wise, against his crown and his own greatness, against his purse and his father's teaching. He had followed the dictates of his own conscience. He had done more than any other Czar, before or since, for the good of Russia. And this was the payment.

The other—the man who had thrown the bomb—was already dead. The terrific explosion had sent his soul hard after the puff of white smoke, and in the twinkling of an eye he stood at the Bar of the Great Assize. It is to be hoped that he made a good defence there, and did not stammer in the presence of his Judge."

G. M. R.

## The Masquerade.

Masked dancers in the Dance of life,  
We move sedately, wearily together;  
Afraid to show a sign of inward strife,  
We hold our souls in tether.

We dance with proud and smiling lips,  
With frank appealing eyes, with shy hands clinging.  
We sing, and few will question if there slips  
A sob into our singing.

Each has a certain step to learn,  
Our prisoned feet move staidly in set paces,  
And to and fro we pass, since life is stern,  
Patiently, with masked faces.

Yet some there are who will not dance,  
They sit apart most sorrowful and splendid;  
But all the rest trip on as in a trance  
Until the Dance is ended.

By OLIVE CUSTANCE  
From *Rainbows*.

## Bookland.

In Miss Jane Barlow's new book "The Founding of Fortunes" the scene is laid chiefly, but not exclusively, on the West Irish coast, where in a small fishing-hamlet one of the fortunes was founded.

## What to Read.

"With Napoleon at St. Helena: being the Memoirs of Dr. John Stokoe, Naval Surgeon." Translated from the French of Paul Frémeaux by Edith S. Stokoe.

"Lord Strathcona: the Story of His Life." By Beckles Willson.

"A Friend of Nelson." By Horace G. Hutchinson.

"A Man of Sentiment." By Thomas Cobb.

"The Colonials." By Allen French.

"The Winds of the World." By the Duchess of Sutherland.

"John of Gerisau." By John Oxenham.

"The Cloistering of Ursula." By Clinton Scollard.

"Olivia's Summer." By Mrs. M. E. Mann.

"The Credit of the County." By W. E. Norris.

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