

the Secretary, Miss Hollingshead, at the Club. This scheme should prove of great use to those visiting the town as well as to the residents.

A women's petition for an alteration in the law relating to married women's property will be presented to the French Parliament immediately after the opening of the session. The great majority of marriages in France take place under what is known as the *communauté des biens*, or common use of the joint fortunes of the two contracting parties, but the law gives the wife no voice in the disposal of the property to which her dowry has contributed. She cannot even make deposits in a bank or savings bank without her husband's consent. The petition urges the right of women to control their own fortunes or earnings. This iniquitous condition of affairs obtained in this country until 1882.

The art of "food-faking" in cheap restaurants is described by a writer in *Household Words*:—"Neck of mutton in many of these establishments, he says, is transformed by the artful *chef* into venison outlets; rabbit appears in the guise of potted pheasant; a portion of cow's heart, cleverly prepared with stuffing, is almost indistinguishable from the breast of goose; the rind of white fresh pork may be artfully prepared to simulate calf's head; the necks of turkeys are made to do duty for ox-tails in the making of soup; and hashed venison is often nothing more than 'long deceased sheep's legs, adroitly pickled, dried, and served with port wine flavouring and the salient shallot.'"

Grandmotherly legislation in regard to the limitation of women's work is always to be deplored, and we are therefore glad that the Dundee Harbour trustees have decided not to interfere with the contractor who employs women to do navy work at the docks. The committee that inquired into the matter reported that they were convinced that everything was being done for the female labourers' comfort, and that there was no legal objection to their employment. The trade council are likely to take action.

Mr. W. H. Wilkins has completed his new work "A Queen of Tears," the history of Queen Matilda of Denmark, sister of George III. The romantic story of this princess of England is but little known. Married to Christian XII. of Denmark, she was divorced, imprisoned, and banished from Court on the charge of an intrigue with the King's Prime Minister. The incident nearly led to a war with England. Mr. Wilkins has had access to the Royal archives at Copenhagen, where many unpublished documents have been placed at his disposal.

A Book of the Week.

BARLASCH OF THE GUARD.*

There are certain respects in which it seems that it would be hard to improve upon Mr. Merriman's present work. It has the finish of an absolutely first-rate technique. It reads as though the writer had drafted every chapter, conceived every incident, adjusted his history, marshalled his characters, arranged his *dénouement*, and then found his sketch so complete that, with a few vivid touches of detail, it was finished.

* By H. S. Merriman. Smith, Elder and Son.

From beginning to end we have not a superfluous word. It is hardly too much to say that not a line could be sacrificed without loss.

We have here a type of the Story reduced to pure science. The vantage ground of the critic is cut away. You cannot pick holes in Mr. Merriman's workmanship. There lies the whole ingenious thing before you; and you feel, with black ingratitude, that it is unsatisfying.

We have heard it said that if you fed a man with nothing but purely digestible food, he would die; and the reader of Mr. Merriman is left with something the same kind of famine. One yearns for something the least bit less well-regulated, the least bit more wayward, more human, than this method of story-telling. Even the bursts of egotism which disfigured Lord Lytton's work, the spite of Thackeray, the eager admiration of his own creations which marred Charles Reade, would be welcome after this passionless calm of concentrated narrative, inexorably working to a dramatic conclusion, at which point it is inexorably left.

So complete is the detachment of the style, that the various people seem to have no relation to each other except such as drama requires. We have a man called Sebastian, posing as a French dancing master in Dantzic, in the time of Napoleon. He has two daughters, Mathilde and Désirée. They live in the same house with him; there their connection seems to end. They apparently know no more of what they are or whence they came than does the reader. Barlasch of the Guard thinks that Sebastian is a French noble, who was condemned to death during the Terror. As to this, his daughters may or may not have been ignorant; they simply ignore the whole subject. They seem to have been on speaking terms with their father; no more. For this situation, no explanation is thought necessary, or attempted. The actions of the characters do not precisely depend upon it; therefore it is superfluous. This prevents the two girls from exciting interest. To the mind of the mere reader they need explaining.

There is only one way in which the author reveals his human frailty. He cannot—positively cannot—resist a sneer at the present day whenever it is possible to pop one in. A sneer at modern generals, a sneer at the Press, many little sneers at modern women, from whom it would seem, to judge from his bitterness, Mr. Merriman has not met with the admiration he doubtless deserves.

The character of Barlasch is great. So great that perhaps we ought to conclude that such an achievement must make a great book. Yet so impressionist is the painting that it is very doubtful whether a large public will be able to love Papa Barlasch as they must do if he were presented with a more clear appeal to their sympathies.

He is the soldier quartered upon the Sebastian household in Dantzic. His arrival—on Désirée's wedding-day—is by no means welcomed by the little family. Yet he is from that moment the bride's good angel; and we feel that the close of his long, hard life is of a beauty and a symmetry which he would himself have desired, could he have chosen how to meet his end. And if the question of works is doubtful, that of faith is incontestable.

"Leave it to me. I shall slip in. Who will stop an old man who has many wounds? Not S

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