

A Book of the Week.

"WANDERING HEATH."*

MR. QUILLER COUCH'S short stories are always welcomed by a large and growing section of the reading public. Most of the tales included in the present volume have seen the light of day before in various magazines and weekly papers, but many of them are well worth reprinting, and one, "The Bishop of Eucalyptus" is a sample of Q's writing at its very highest level. The Bishop was a young and enthusiastic Congregational minister, who went out on a mission to Eucalyptus, in the Rocky Mountains, which was a settlement of ruffianly characters and dishonest rascals; but the youthful parson had such a pure, sweet-natured mind, that he never found out what a desperate set he had fallen amongst, and treated the men, with boyish confidence, to the recital of all his aspirations, and the women with respect, and with intense gratitude for all their kindness to him in illness. The consequence was that this rowdy community began to wish that they were all that their so-called Bishop thought they were, and almost, without knowing it, modified their language and their coarseness in his presence. It is easy to see from this short synopsis of the story what splendid material "Q" has devised for his tale, which is told with an art whose highest sign manual is that of subtle simplicity. That sounds like a paradox, but nevertheless there is nothing so subtly beguiling in literary art as simplicity of diction. It is the same thing which made the shrewd observer remark that the finest manner in the world was just no manner at all! Miss Montmorency (*alias* Flyheel Flo) is a lady who is not possessed, by any means, of a peerless reputation amongst even her compatriots, but the Bishop never found out that she was in any way different from other single demoiselles, and he speaks, to the doctor she calls in for him, of her blameless, single life. Small wonder that Captain Bill (one of the first settlers in Eucalyptus) smiled grimly, and said to the self-same doctor, after he had heard his amazing story of the Bishop's shortsightedness, "Wickedness? Lord love you! He couldn't see any. He'd go through Frisco and out of the far end, without so much as guessing the place had a seamy side to it;" and here is the pathetic description that the doctor gives after he had talked much with the Bishop:—

"In the first place, though I had read in a good many poetry books of maidens who had walked through all manner of deadliness unhurt—Una and the lion, you know, and the rest of them—I hadn't imagined that kind, or amount of innocence in a young man. But what startled me even more, was the size of his ambitions . . . 'Twas a Peter the Hermit's part, or a Savonarola's, or Whitfield's at least, he was going to play all along the Pacific slope, and his outfit no more than a small Bible and the strength of a mouse. And with all this the poor boy was just wearying for home, and every small fibre in his sick heart pulling him back while he fixed his eyes on the lights up the mountain, and stiffened his back and talked about putting a hand to the plough and not turning back."

I confess to finishing the story with real difficulty, for the best of spectacles will not remove one kind of dimness of vision!

* "Wandering Heath:" Stories, Studies and Sketches by "Q." 6s. (Cassell & Co.)

"The Bishop of Eucalyptus" is so human and so infinitely suggestive, that readers may feel inclined to quarrel with "Q" for not making the rest of the contents of this volume as good. The rest of the tales are not up to its level, nay, do not approach it in excellence, but "The Looe Die-Hards" is very funny, and the picture of the volunteer who thought himself dying, and lay in bed complacently listening to the band of his regiment practising "The Dead Marching Soul" (as they called Handel's famous masterpiece) is genuinely comic and delectable. The rest of the tales may be saved from oblivion by the art with which they are written, but they do not call for special mention, and truth to tell, have not left any distinct impression upon the memory of the reviewer.

But the Bishop will never let himself be forgotten, and reading about him recalled so vividly to my mind an old Persian legend that I cannot resist the temptation of relating it here, in case some of our readers do not know it already. It is by way of illustrating the type of saintliness that can only see the good and cannot, or will not, perceive the evil in the world.

"Once upon a time the Master and his disciples were walking through the streets of the city, and in the pathway there lay the decaying and putrid carcase of a dead dog. One of the disciples exclaimed at the terrible odour of the beast, another turned his eyes aside and would not look at it, while a third enquired why the public scavenger had so neglected his duty as to leave such a ghastly and decaying object in the highway, but the Holy One himself said with an appreciative glance as he passed along, 'Why pearls cannot equal the whiteness of its teeth!'"

A. M. G.

Reviews.

The Daily Chronicle now makes a special feature of its Saturday edition, which is splendidly illustrated, and contains special articles dealing with departments interesting to every kind of woman—the domestic, the professional and the political. The *Chronicle* has long been the only "daily" which has regarded women as being of the least importance in the world, and it is showing more than ever by this new Saturday edition that the "woman movement" is really a strong factor in life. The *Chronicle* is a paper every thinking woman should support, as it is the only one which has seriously supported women.

There has been such a strong demand for the *Ludgate Magazine* for May, which contains Dr. Arabella Kenealy's powerful story of "A Human Vivisection," that the magazine was "out of print" a few days after publication. The June number of this magazine will contain a story by Dr. Kenealy, entitled, "A Haunted Child," which deals with a most interesting and mysterious psychological question which has never before been touched upon.

The *Daily Mail*, the new ½d. paper, issued by Messrs. Harmsworth, is really a bit of wonderful journalism, based somewhat on American lines, without the vulgarity and objectionable features which render a large number of trans-atlantic newspapers

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)