

## A Book of the Week.

"MRS. CLIFF'S YACHT."\*

THERE are some people who are unable by nature to appreciate the humour of Frank Stockton, just as there are some who will never like Jane Austen. For my part, I pity the former almost as much as Mr. Birrell pities the latter.

No doubt his fun is of an unusual kind; it has a flavour of its own; it is very grave fun; and people who like their jokes underlined will probably decide that Stockton does not make any. But, in spite of its slyness, the fun is there all the same.

Chief of his idiosyncracies is his delight in making an elderly lady the heroine of his tales. Now there is something irresistibly funny in the idea of a worthy old soul, who has lived all her life in some little remote town in the United States, suddenly finding herself cast away on a desert island. It is the sort of fun that might very easily be made vulgar; but there is absolutely no vulgarity at all in Mr. Stockton's composition. Perhaps this is after all what makes his humour so unique. It is always without the least suggestion of coarseness. His old ladies are always nice old ladies; in fact, Mrs. Cliff and her devoted friend, Willy Croup, are two of the most charming people ever encountered between the covers of a novel, and their cruise in the *Summer Shelter* one of the most fascinating expeditions ever undertaken in any vessel since the voyage of the *Argo*.

The only drawback to this book is that to completely enter into the spirit of it one should have previously read "The Adventures of Captain Horn," which tells how Mrs. Cliff came by these riches which she finds so much difficulty in spending. Her pathetic struggles to keep pace with her income, without having to change the kind of life she has always known and liked, for some other in which she would not be at ease, are very subtly laughable. She calculates that, with her money accumulating at compound interest, she grows two dollars richer every minute. "Why, whilst I've been talking to you, my money has increased enough to buy anybody a good silver watch. I daresay Willy would like one, but what is the good of buying it when in an hour or so I could afford a gold one?"

The excellent Mr. Burke is the hit of the story. His notion of a "lark" when first he comes into his money is too good to be spoilt by telling beforehand; his own recital of it is inimitable. But it is when the *Summer Shelter* puts out to sea, with him as captain, that the fun waxes fast and furious. The excellent Mrs. Cliff has purchased the yacht on purely philanthropic grounds, that she may send invalids for summer cruises. She and Willy Croup are going a trial trip in her, and Mrs. Cliff is so distressed at the idea of all the beautiful state rooms being vacant that she invites the members of a synod of American clergy to come too. Fourteen of them accept her invitation, and the stupefaction of Mr. Burke when he hears the news is irresistibly funny. "I said," he observes, "that we should get our fun and our charity together on this yacht; but I guess we shall have to take our charity straight this cruise."

\*"Mrs. Cliff's Yacht," by Frank R. Stockton.

However, he alters his opinion when the synod recovers from its sea-sickness and waxes genial. "Shouldn't mind taking a ship-load of parsons every trip," says he; "only we would ship them on a tug first, and let them cruise around the light-ship for two or three days; and then, when they hoisted a signal, 'All well on board,' we'd go and pick 'em up."

Of the inestimable services of the synod later on, when the *Summer Shelter* is left without a crew; of the thrilling adventures of the treasure ship, *Dunkery Beacon*; and, above all, of how Willy Croup backed the yacht, it is not fair to speak more fully, lest a really good story should be marred in the telling.

G. M. R.

## Bookland.

MRS. MEYNELL has been asked to compile an Anthology of English verse. The selection is to be left entirely to the lady's discretion, she is to choose only poetry that she herself cares for; under these circumstances, the volume, which will probably appear in summer or autumn, will doubtless prove very charming.

"George Egerton's" new book, "Symphonies," will be published shortly.

### WHAT TO READ.

'Seventeenth Century Studies,' by Edmund Gosse.  
'Life in West London': a Study and a Contrast, by Arthur Sherwell, M.A.

'Timbuctoo the Mysterious,' by Felix Dubois.

'Travels in West Africa,' by Miss Mary Kingsley.

'A Narrative of the Boer War,' by T. F. Carter.

'Pheoso,' by Anthony Hope.

'The Little Regiment, and other episodes of the American Civil War,' by Stephen Crane.

'Denys D'Auvrillac,' by Hannah Lynch.

'McLeod of the Camerons,' by M. Hamilton, Author of "A Self-denying Ordinance."

'A Pinchbeck Goddess,' by Mrs. J. M. Fleming (Alice M. Kipling).

## Coming Events.

February 16th.—International Sanitary Conference on the Plague, at Venice.

Mr. Bancroft's reading of the "Christmas Carol" on behalf of the Chelsea Hospital for Women, at Stafford House, St. James's, at 3.30.

February 23rd.—Princess Christian opens a Bazaar (three days) at the Star and Garter, Richmond, in aid of the Waifs and Strays Society.

The Lord Mayor presides at a Dinner in support of the Female Orphan Asylum, Beddington, at the Hôtel Métropole.

A special meeting of the General Committee of the National Union of Women Workers, 59, Berners Street, W., 2.30 p.m.

February 24th.—Women's Total Abstinence Union. Afternoon Meeting for Nurses, Grosvenor House, 3 p.m.

February 26th.—Third Sessional Lecture, Royal British Nurses' Association, 17, Old Cavendish Street, on "Home Sanitation" (with lantern illustrations), by Henry Kenwood, Esq., M.B.Edin., D.P.H.St., 8 p.m.

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