

A Book of the Week.

"THE MINISTER OF STATE."

THE kailyard has developed another exponent—one more unmerciful even than Mr. Crockett—one who takes us farther north, and makes us read about people whose native tongue was Gaelic—the language spoken by Adam!

In this book there is the inevitable peasant genius: he begins as a herd; the title of the book warns us of what he is to become before we have done with him; and the reader's courage somewhat sinks, as the mass of closely printed pages shows what is before him. It takes very nearly a hundred and fifty of these pages to get Evan Kinloch out of his kailyard, which is encouragingly furnished with a cruel aunt, a furious bull, and a savage, man-eating horse. We are also introduced to the equally inevitable dominie—a priceless mine of classics; occupying the humble post of master of the village school. Yet another regulation kailyard figure is forthcoming in the rough-diamond doctor, and we feel that we have all the properties necessary to a romance of this well-known order.

Evan takes every conceivable prize, exhibition, and scholarship at Edinburgh and at Oxford: reads for the bar, does a little journalism, gets noticed by a famous Q.C., is made a Judge, then Solicitor-General.

The enumeration of these things takes the whole book. The story has merit—great merit: but it is of a limited kind. In the kailyard the writer is in his element, and some of the drunken scenes, in particular, are singularly racy, and of the soil. But his Oxford is distressing, especially when Matthew Arnold and the late Master of Balliol appear on the scene and begin to "talk tall." And for the rest, the book, as a story, is ruined by the fact that Mr. Dudley, the millionaire, and his family, are so many puppets, simply walking the stage at the will of the author. The sprightly Florence belongs to the era of Charles Reade, and is a rag doll who totally fails to enlist our sympathies. When Mr. Dudley, who believes in Evan's future, keeps him in the house, calls him by his Christian name and throws his daughter at his head, suddenly turns him out without notice because he finds that the inevitable is happening—we feel that the ways of novelists are past finding out. When she calmly goes and marries the other man, we are not astonished that Evan, after a time, bears his cross with singular equanimity: but when, very shortly after the death of her husband, whom she appears to have loved, Evan renews his proposal to her, without so much as an allusion to her past faithlessness to himself, we feel that these people can no longer be accepted as belonging to the same order of things as ourselves: their motives are inexplicable, and they must therefore cease to interest. There is one strong situation in the book—the hero, in his capacity as judge, has to try, and sentence Mr. Dudley and Florence's husband for fraud. Florence visits him to implore him to give a lenient sentence. The author does not know what to do with this situation, and it falls quite flat.

This is all the more disappointing because the book has something about it all through, which lifts it above the common.

The finest scene is where the gentle David finally

* "The Minister of State." By J. A. Steuart. (Heinemann & Co.)

rebels against his son's ill-treatment at the hands of his relations. Parts of this are very well written. So are some of the scenes between Evan and the inevitable dominie. But the tale is a chronicle, not a novel: and one wearies of the telegrams announcing Evan's triumphs, after the arrival of the third or fourth, and its effect upon the village has been chronicled. One thinks of that immortal telegram in "When a Man's Single": "*Rob has married the Colonel's daughter—Rob has married the Colonel.*" There is nothing to bewilder the Gaelic intellect in the messages which arrive in Evan's birthplace.

It seems rather a cheap literary trick to describe the two leading politicians of the day as Mr. Distoire and Mr. Gasten. It is one of the many little touches which seem to remind one of a bygone type of novelist in Mr. Steuart's work:—as for example, the description of a young society swell as a "perfumed gallant."

G. M. R.

Crossing the River.

In some lone walk through sunburnt fields,
By sandy path and dusty road,
Hast thou not cast thine eyes abroad,
Seen afar off a watered scene,
A grove of deep and tender green,
And found a river flows between?

There is a stream whose waves divide
Life from the shady shores beyond;
And we on this sad side are found,
Toiling on sandy flats, I ween,
Sighs our one moisture, tears are sheen
While the still river flows between.

And yet, when our beloved rise
To gird them for the ford, and pass
From wilderness to springing grass,
From barren waste to living green,
We weep that they no more are seen,
And that the river flows between.

Ah, could we follow where they go
And pierce the holy shade they find,
One grief were ours—to stay behind!
One hope—to join the Blest Unseen,
To plant our steps where theirs have been,
And find no river-flows between!

(From "Songs in Minor Keys."
By C. C. FRASER TYTLER.)

WHAT TO READ.

- "Songs of Love and Empire." By E. Nesbit.
- "The Indian Frontier War, 1897." By Lionel James.
- "Life of Judge Jeffreys." By H. B. Irving.
- "Aristocracy and Evolution." By W. H. Mallock.
- "The Kingdom of the Yellow Robe—Siam." By Ernest Young.
- "The Souls of the Stones." By T. Preston Battersby, F.R.A.S.
- "The Cattle Man." By G. B. Burgin.
- "Her Wild Oats." By John Bickerdyke.
- "Wheat in the Ear." By "Alien."
- "A Soldier of Manhattan." By J. A. Altsheuler.
- "Colonel Thorndyke's Secret." By G. A. Henty.
- "Dearer than Honour." By E. Livingston Prescott.
- "Tom Sails: A Tale of a Welsh Village." By Allen Raine.

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