

A Book of the Week.

LIKE ANOTHER HELEN.*

THIS is a book which has, I think, been underpraised by the Reviewers. It will not be to the taste of every one; but its real cleverness is quite undoubted.

In a kind of sub-title, it professes itself to be "The History of the cruel misfortunes and undeserved distresses of a young lady of Virtue and Sensibility, resident at Bengall during the years 1755—1757, which is contained in her letters, written to a friend of her own sex, and carefully preserved by the lady to whom they were addressed."

The style is a deliberate, and, on the whole, a very successful imitation of Miss Burney's "Evelina." Sometimes the original has been perhaps somewhat too slavishly copied, as in alluding to her father as "the most venerable of men," and so on; and there is a repetition of certain words, such as "questionless," which may have been the one word of that period, as "vastly" was the one word of Miss Edgworth's day; but too much repetition is irksome, and one longs for a change. The equally constant use of "e'nt," which is, I suppose, the ancestor of the terrible "ain't," which in my early childhood was still in use among persons who ought to have known better—"You en't President of Bengall yet," for example—is also, I should fancy, a correct rendering of the speech of the period.

To us it seems a strange thing that the fair Sylvia, the toast of Calcutta, the young lady whose delicacy and *punctilio* were to her the one thing that made life worth living, should have been so extremely careless about the agreement of her nouns and verbs. Also, that the two "venerable instructresses of her youth," should have considered the woes of Clarissa Harlow a suitable book for the perusal of the young females of extreme delicacy under their care.

But the cleverness of the narrator consists, to me, in this. Never once does he step forth into the present day, and allow his heroine even for a moment to become natural. Sylvia lives through the horrors of the Black Hole, she is immured in the harem of a renegade Frenchman who is in the confidence of Surajah Dowlah, from thence she is rescued at the imminent peril of both their lives, by Colvin Fraser, the brave young naval officer who loves her—pardon, I should say, who is her humble servant—and yet never for one single instant, does she forget that she is a young lady of Virtue and Sensibility, never does she succeed in discarding externals and remembering only that she is a woman, and that her lover has risked his life for her. At the suggestion of a sudden marriage with the man who has surrendered all his hopes of distinction for her, she trembles, she pleads her delicacy and her punctilio; at the bare idea of leaving the city where her detected presence would cause the instant death of all the brave men who are protecting her, disguised as a boy, or as a Nautch girl, she simply says that she would prefer death. And we know that this is perfectly true to history; that, had Fraser found her capable of facing danger without a fainting fit, or marriage with the man of her choice without a total overthrow of spirit and a scarcely supportable tremor, in fact, without a flood of mis-timed sentiment of the most inconvenient kind, he would have thought her

* By Sydney Grier. Blackwood.

totally wanting in that innate refinement which should distinguish the young gentlewoman.

Yet this trembling creature, all blushes and fears and reserves, and hesitations and artifice, was perfectly familiar with the exact nature of Lovelace's pursuit of Clarissa, and apparently of many things that would now bring the colour to the cheek of a well-bred English girl, who would yet think it no shame to show her unquestioning love and trust for the man who had faced death for her sake.

Autres temps, autres mœurs. Mr. Grier makes us realize it very skillfully; and his romance seems to me to be a great and real success. His account of the behaviour of the English civilians at the taking of Calcutta, certainly does not raise one's opinion of one's countrymen. G. M. R.

Poem.

THE SOUL TO THE IDEAL.

I will not hear thy music sweet!
If I should listen, then I know
I should no more know friend from foe,
But follow thy capricious feet—
Thy wings than mine so much more fleet—
I will not go!

I will not go away! Away
From reeds and pool why should I go
To where sun burns, and hot winds blow?
Here sleeps cool twilight all the day;
Do I not love thy tune? No, no!
I will not say!

I will not say I love thy tune;
I do not know if so it be;
It surely is enough for me
To know I love cool rest at noon,
Spread thy bright wings—ah, go—go soon!
I will not see!

I will not see thy gleaming wings,
I will not hear thy music clear,
It is not love I feel, but fear;
I love the song the marsh-frog sings,
But thine, which after sorrow brings,
I will not hear!

—From *Lays and Legends*. By E. NESBIT.

WHAT TO READ.

- "Trooper 3809." By Lionel Declé.
- "The Man with the Hoe: and Other Poems." By Edwin Markham.
- "Idyls of Killowen: A Soggarth's Secular Verses." By the Rev. Matthew Russell, S.J.I.
- "The South African Frontier." By W. Harvey Brown.
- "Siren City." By Benjamin Swift.
- "Jasper Tristram." By A. W. Clarke.
- "The White King of Manoa." By Joseph Hatton.
- "The Hacienda on the Hill." By R. H. Savage.
- "Cruise of the Cachalot." By Frank T. Bullen.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)