

A Book of the Week.

"JAN OXBER."*

"Jan Oxber" is a book which is being a good deal talked about just now, and one hears a good deal of discussion as to whether or no the author should be accused of poaching upon the manor of Mr. Thomas Hardy. This seems an ungracious charge. The author of this clever collection of dialect stories goes indeed for his inspiration to a Wessex village, but Wessex is no more the exclusive property of Mr. Hardy than the kail-yard was the monopoly of Mr. Barrie. Why should not Wessex have another prophet? In Orme Agnus it has one by no means unworthy of high traditions.

The first and longest story in the book, "Jan Oxber," is the least to the taste of the present reviewer. The dialogue is good, the descriptions put in with a sure touch, the action well developed; but the characters are too much the old stock in trade—the virtuous peasant, the wicked squire, the helpless village maid, the toadying parson. One instantly sees the whole plot without reading the tale; the only touch which surprises, being that the village Hampden, after administering exemplary punishment to the wicked squire, is actually not sentenced to lifelong imprisonment by a bench of those unrighteous judges for whom England is as notorious as she is for all the other concomitants of this kind of story. No; Jan is merely bound over to keep the peace, and subsequently carries his Hampdenism to Australia, where he becomes rich and prosperous. Meanwhile, the manner of narration is charming and must not be under-valued; and we are given at least one English gentleman, in the person of General Pexworth, who does not consider sexual vice as quite excuseable in a landed proprietor.

The cleverest of the collection is called "The Taming by a Shrew." Caleb Lupshaw is a lazy lout who has never done a hand's turn of work in his life, but is content to live upon the hard-earned savings of his poor old mother. He goes courting a maiden in a neighbouring town, telling her of his large farm and his riches. The girl believes the tale, for the contemptible Caleb, having by accident discovered his mother's little hoard beneath the boards in her room, is able to supplement his romance by a gift of a gold watch. But between the marriage ceremony and Caleb's coming to fetch his wife home, she is enlightened by chance as to the man's real character and position. She forms a plan of campaign in her own mind, and carries it out so bravely, that in the course of a year or two, the village loafer has become quite a respectable member of society. It is admirably told, and by one who has really studied village life and amenities. The best touch is the underlying feeling of resentment which the poor old mother never quite loses, though she sees her cruel, selfish, lazy son reformed before her eyes.

Of the remaining tales, the best is "The Conversion of Silas Damson," which is admirable in its way. "Thee go to Mesopotamia, thee bist a Jebusite," is a completely satisfactory equivalent for less gentle methods of dismissal, to regions let us hope more remote than Mesopotamia.

On the whole the book is well worth reading, and should be included in the holiday parcel from Mudie's.

G. M. R.

* By Orme Agnus. Ward, Lock & Co.

Bookland.

Mr. Fisher Unwin is about to publish a book by Josiah Flynt, entitled "Tramping with Tramps." It is an account of the adventures of a scientific student who lived the life of a tramp in various countries that he might study the question of tramps and their relation to crime on its own ground and in its own environment.

Miss Gertrude Atherton's new story of political life in Washington, entitled "Senator North," will be published by Mr. John Lane on September 5th.

A new book by Mark Twain, called "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg," consisting of stories and sketches, will be published early in September by Chatto and Windus.

Poem.

"PEKIN RELIEVED NIGHT FIFTEENTH."

God of the Storm and the Whirlwind,
God of the Fire and the Sword,
Mighty, Creator, Upholder,
Wonderful, Councillor, Lord!
God of the Cross, of the Martyrs,
God of Humanity, hear—
Europe's triumphant Laudamus,
Christendom's prayer!

Safe, tho' the lightning of rapine
Ran round the prisoning walls:
Safe, tho' the thunder of carnage
Crashed o'er their splintering halls:
Safe, tho' the billows of murder
Rolled to their gateways, and roared—
Safe passed they thro' for Jehovah
Cleft them a ford!

Glory to Thee and Hosannah,
Glory and laud without end,
Thou who didst stand in the battle,
Thou who didst shield and defend;
Strong is Thine arm to deliver!
Jehovah, Thy word shall not fail!
God, when Thou guardest the city
Who shall prevail!

Lord, let Thy mercy be with us
Guiding the nations from hate,
Till it doth knit and encompass
One people, one purpose, one State:
Till the sword rust in the scabbard,
Till the lance rot on the wall,
Till at Thy Cross we acknowledge
Thee over all!

From the Morning Post.

WHAT TO READ.

- "China: The Long-lived Empire." By Eliza R. Scidmore.
"The Romance of the South Pole." By G. B. Smith.
"Golden Deeds of the War." By A. T. Story.
"The Web of Life." By Robert Herrick.
"The Increasing Purpose: A tale of the Kentucky Hemp Fields." By James Lane Allen.
"The Crimson Weed." By Christopher St. John.
"A Thing of Nought." By S. K. Bevan.
"The Person in the House." By G. B. Burgin.

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