

"By and bye," says Miss Brooke-Hunt, "one of them came up to me and asked me where he could get a Postal Order for 10s. to send home to his wife. Alas, it was already past the time when the Army post-office closed, and the man would have started on the march long before it opened in the morning. He looked very disappointed, and then a sudden inspiration seized him. 'If I left you the money, miss, would you kindly see to it,' he asked, and forthwith handed me over half-a-sovereign and half-a-crown, the latter to pay for the order and the postage. I assured him threepence would be ample for this latter purpose, but he appeared to have a profound distrust of South African postal freaks. . . . In a few moments I had a crowd round me who were all bent on the same mission, and eventually I found myself in charge of £83, and over 200 letters. None of the men had ever seen me before, so their confidence was as touching as it was characteristic."

Why should not the War Office in time of peace organize a corps of women workers of proved ability, who could afford just such valuable service in time of war as Miss Brooke-Hunt describes? One lesson we have at least learnt in this war, the butterfly type must be kept at home in the future. Those who wish to know what valuable service can be rendered should read Miss Brooke-Hunt's most readable record of work. The book is published by James Nisbet & Co., 21, Berners Street, W. Price 5s.

A Book of the Week.

THE LUCK OF THE VAILS.*

To the present reviewer, this is a singularly interesting book, for in it Mr. Benson has attempted to do that which so many of his craft have attempted in vain, namely, to make a blend of the sensational and the character novel. Of course, Wilkie Collins before him has attempted the same feat, and made a partial success. That is to say, Wilkie Collins was the first to discard altogether the methods of "The Mysteries of Udolpho," and novels of that school, and to make adventures happen, not to the superlatively lovely maiden of noble birth, and the gallant stripling, who with her, lives in a world otherwise exclusively composed of villains, but to the ordinary person, to the elderly housekeeper as well as the young peer, to the plain girl equally with the beauty.

We cannot help thinking that Mr. Benson has somewhat taken a leaf from the book of Wilkie Collins in devising the character of Francis Vail; there is somewhat in that plausible gentleman which from the first suggests the once famous Count Fosco. The overdone benevolence, the child-like vivacity, the clear complexion, sound sleep, good spirits, and other things suggestive of a quiet conscience and a venerable old age; and the partiality of the devilish old schemer for playing on the flute seems a curious parallel to the Count's fondness for his canary birds.

But Wilkie Collins could never have devised the characters of the two young men, Lord Vail and his friend, nor of the other society persons whose light conversation and up-to-dateness makes much of the charm of the tale. When Wilkie Collins approached

* By E. F. Benson.

the aristocracy he stepped at once out of the regions of real life into an atmosphere of ethereal beauty and haughty vice; Mr. Benson succeeds just where he failed.

Still, it will be a curious surprise to most of his readers to find the author of "Dodo" dealing in secret staircases, revolving pictures, plots to murder, dark-faced physicians, and mysterious draughts, to say nothing of an ancestral curse of the very best kind.

"The Luck of the Vails" is a richly ornamented chalice, encrusted with gems, and bearing, of course, a rhyming warning, to the effect that the possessor thereof is to "fear both frost and fire and rain." One wonders where the luck of possessing it comes in. It has been mislaid for a number of years, when Harry Vail, the orphan representative of the house, comes across it, on the eve of attaining his majority, carelessly tossed aside, in a remote attic, under piles of lumber. The only living relative of Harry Vail is his uncle Francis; and here the famous Ardamont case has supplied Mr. Benson with an idea. Francis Vail has been under a cloud for twenty years, his friend, whose life was insured in his favour for a large amount, having been accidentally shot while out alone with him. The doctor, who gave evidence to the effect that the injuries were, in his opinion, self-inflicted—that is, caused by the accidental discharge of the gun while getting over a stile—appears later on in the story in a very remarkable manner.

Harry is an unsuspecting, open-hearted boy, extremely fond of his uncle, and believing firmly in his innocence. When things begin to happen, he puts it all down to the effect of the "luck," and not to the machinations of the white haired old flute-player. The story is well worked up, the reader travels through it breathless, and it is just the book for the summer vacation, a book of a sort which has lately been neglected. But it is not Mr. Benson.

G. M. R.

What to Read.

"The Life of the Emperor Frederick." From the German of Margaretha Von Poschinger. Edited with an Introduction by Sidney Whitman.

"The Two First Centuries of Florentine History; the Republic and Parties at the Time of Dante." By Professor Pasquale Villari. Translated by Linda Villari.

"Romantic Stories of our Scottish Towns." By W. H. Davenport Adams.

"My Fourth Tour in Western Australia." By Albert F. Calvert.

"The Souls of Passage." By Amelia E. Barr.

"By Rock and Pool on an Austral Shore." By Louis Becke.

Coming Event.

THE INTERNATIONAL NURSES' CONGRESS.

September 16th.—Meetings of the National Associated Alumnae, of the Superintendents' Society, of the International Council of Nurses.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)