

## A Book of the Week.

## THE CONQUEST OF CHARLOTTE.\*

It is very difficult to criticise this curious book. It can be classified only as one of those few which have their direct inspiration in the works of George Meredith. Its force is undeniable, its turgidity deplorable, its obscurity at times unpardonable. One reads it to an accompaniment of the brushing away of the mist of words to enable one to see clearly what the author means. He does not, like Henry James, offer you an insoluble enigma, as a fact, so obvious that it does not even need stating; but he does wrap up some apparently simple facts in such wild and whirling words as to cause mental giddiness in the first chapter; and, indeed, all through, he never quite succeeds in blowing the foam from the surface of the tankard.

The hero is the narrator. This in itself always makes for confusion, even in a simple narrative, entailing a number of quotations from various authorities, weariful hints and repetitions and assurances that various people would have acted differently could they have foreseen the consequences. We start with a legend of the deathbed of an old Scots laird; what everyone saw, and what everyone imagined he saw; and on this same night are born two children—Rab Cuick, and the girl who is afterwards known as Charlotte Seton. Rab Cuick is the kernel of this hard nut. Let us own at once that it is worth the cracking. Rab Cuick the Rascal! And what a rascal! The real genuine article, this—the man who would not give a fig for righteousness—to whom the whole zest of life consists in playing upon the natures of other men as a fiddler may play upon his strings. Witty, persuasive, cunning, brutal, callous, brilliant—a heartless optimist, a tireless antagonist; a study in humanity!

Some of his escapades we have in full; as his driving the excise officer's son in a cart full of smuggled goods, and coolly unlading it from the back, while bidding the lad on no account take his eyes off the mare's ears. Such as this make excellent reading; the darker portions of his life—the real deep smuggling ventures are merely touched upon, and left in masterly mysterious gloom.

David Shina falls in love at about nineteen with Rab's daughter Charlotte, and, according to the writer's chronology, does not get in his first proposal until the young lady is thirty-one years old. These Scots are a canny set; but this seems a slow wooing, even for the Lowlands. When at last he does start, the lame nature of his proposals is perhaps an explanation of his diffidence in making them. He is a poor lover—in fact, a poor creature altogether; it is a wonder that he can have such an evident appreciation of Rab's parts, still more wonderful that he should conquer Charlotte.

For a taste of our author's obscurity, take the following:—

"Being callow, and a long way off having a passion of my own, I fell into the attitude towards Rab, of those whose passion had been hurried; and was inclined to revolt from the common opinion, when, in the absence of direct charges against him, people merely bespattered him in digging for the precious thing, his wife. Once I crowed a little, in this strain—not touching the particular case—before my father, a plain man; and surprised him into a tentative like crow. His had a different note; but I imagined that I recognised my sentiment."

G. M. R.

\*By David S. Meldrum, Blackwood and Sons.

## 'Reapers' Song.

We bring the harvest home,  
No longer need we fear  
By day or night,  
Blemish or blight,  
On wheat and oat and bere.  
The corn was full in ear,  
Golden and tremulous;  
The far fields and the near  
Were golden fields for us:  
Well cut, well bound,  
Well shocked, well saved from the ground.  
Whoop holloa!

We bring the harvest home.  
In strong and scorching light  
Day after day  
We won the hay  
And left the stripped fields white.  
We called the women in  
To glean what we passed o'er,  
Their harvesting to win  
From our o'erflowing store.  
Well cut, well bound!  
Well shocked, well saved from the ground.  
Whoop holloa!

We bring the harvest home.  
With garlands hung around,  
We watched them start  
The last full cart  
From the stripped harvest ground.  
The prettiest gleaner, Margaret,  
We crowned with ears of corn, and set  
High on the cart as on a throne,  
A harvest-lady of our own.  
Now we'll go home to drink and eat  
And romp, for labour done is sweet—  
Ay, sweeter than fine honeycomb—  
For we have brought the harvest home,  
Well cut, well bound,  
Well shocked, well saved from the ground.  
Whoop holloa!

NORA CHESSON.  
From the *Westminster Gazette*.

## Bookland.

Mr. Fisher Unwin will publish early in September a new novel by John Oliver Hobbes (Mrs. Craigie), entitled "Love and the Soul Hunters." It is a picture of modern society.

## What to Read.

"New Tales of Old Rome." By R. Lanciani.  
"Lady Beatrix and the Forbidden Man."  
"The Passion of Mahael." By Lilian Bowen Rowlands.  
"The Story of Verona." By Alethea Wiel.  
"Love and the Soul Hunters." By John Oliver Hobbes.  
"The Strange Adventures of James Shervington." By Louis Becke.  
"A Life at Stake." By Percy Andrae.

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