

A Book of the Week.

BROTHERS.*

Mr. Vachell's book contains, as usual, excellent work. He is always intelligent, sometimes deep, occasionally—very occasionally—animated. Must we also add—never inspired?

The present book is a good example of the fact that it is really impossible to lay down any kind of rule for writers of fiction. It has been often said—I am pretty sure that I have said it in these pages some time during the many years that we have chatted together—that a life experience, when chronicled, is usually so vital that it interests by the very force of naked truth. Many a writer has written one burning book out of his or her own bitter life story, and the result has been startling in its power to grip.

But to the writer who takes this as an axiom and tries to search his own archives of memory for living pictures there lurk many pitfalls. There is a tendency to enlarge unduly upon trifling things, which have seemed important, or lovable, or striking to the one who lived through them, but which, put into a book, are wholly out of focus.

It seems to me that Mr. Vachell has not escaped this danger. His *dramatis personae* do not somehow always hang together. We are told about them, the things that Mr. Vachell remembered; and these things are not always salient.

It must be just this which prevents a really meritorious bit of work from assuming its just proportions in our admiration. It needs the hand of a master of style to make the history of two boys interesting, through their nursery, school, and college days, and afterwards when they are men. The time needed in which to grow up is too long for a novel. Frankly, Mr. Vachell's book is too long and much too verbose.

Archibald and Mark Sapphire are brothers. Archie, the elder, is handsome, athletic, taking, weak in character, deficient in brilliance. Mark is delicate, and stammers; but has the makings of a genius. He is disappointed all along of his hopes and ambitions, by physical drawbacks. He tries for the army, and fails to get through his army medical. He takes holy orders, and finds his stammer an invincible hindrance to his really great gift for preaching. Finally, the doctors pronounce him too delicate to think of marriage, and Betty, the girl he has always loved, and who loves him, must be surrendered. She, too, falls to the fortunate brother—who has gained her heart, as a matter of fact, by preaching a wonderful sermon which Mark had written. It is the story of Cyrano de Bergerac in part.

The shock of finding that Betty is to marry his brother makes shipwreck of poor Mark's faith, which must always, one thinks, have been of the emotional order. Meanwhile, he has been undergoing an open-air cure in the Highlands, and with such success that he cheats the doctors and makes a complete recovery.

And now Mr. Vachell makes his mistake. He makes Betty find out that Mark wrote the sermons for which her complacent husband has taken credit. She then goes down, all the way from London to Weybridge, and practically throws herself into Mark's arms, arranging an elopement with hardly a hesitation.

It is not convincing. Mark and Betty, as here

represented, are not the people who elope with their brothers' wives. Adultery and incest are not the kind of crime that appeal to people of such a type. We are not made to feel that it was likely, because passion is not in Mr. Vachell's line. The fascinations of Sybil Perowne, the actress, who afterwards enslaves Mark, also fail to convince, and for the same reason.

The book leaves us cold. It is full of interest; the situation is what is called a "strong one." But it leaves us cold. It just does not get there. Which is a pity.

G. M. R.

Verse.

"In men whom men pronounce as ill,
I find so much of goodness still;
In men whom men pronounce divine,
I find so much of sin and blot;
I hesitate to draw the line
Between the two, when God has not."

JOAQUIN MILLER, *Philistine*.

What to Read.

"The Return to Nature: Songs and Symbols." By Madame Mary Duclaux.

"The Man Roosevelt: a Portrait Sketch." By Francis E. Leupp.

"The New Era in South Africa." By Violet R. Markham.

"Society in the New Reign. By a Foreign Resident."

"Dorothea: A Story of the Pure in Heart." By Maarten Maartens.

"Olive Latham." By E. L. Voynich.

"The Faith of Men." By Jack London.

"The Apprentice." By Maud Stepney Rawson.

Coming Events.

June 25th.—General Meeting of the League of St. Bartholomew's Hospital Nurses at the Hospital, 3 p.m. Social Gathering, 4.30 p.m.

June 25th.—The Prince and Princess of Wales will open the new Sanatorium and Convalescent Home, in connection with the Brompton Hospital for Consumption and Diseases of the Chest, at Heatherside, near Camberley, 4 p.m.

June 30th.—Meeting Central Midwives' Board, 6, Suffolk Street, Pall Mall, 2.45 p.m.

July 1st.—Drawing-room Meeting for Nurses, by the invitation of the Earl and Countess of Portsmouth, 16, Mansfield Street, Portland Place, 3.30 p.m.

July 6th.—The King and Queen visit St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and His Majesty lays the foundation-stone of the New Building at 12.30 p.m.

July 8th.—H.R.H. the Duchess of Albany will visit the Royal Hospital, Richmond, Surrey, and open the new Out-patients' and Ophthalmic Departments, 4 p.m.

July 13th.—Opening by H.R.H. Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, of the New Building of the North-Eastern Hospital for Children, Hackney Road.

* By Horace Annesley Vachell. (Murray.)

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