

Book of the Week.

THE SECRET KINGDOM.*

Christmas, being the time for a good laugh, we recommend our readers to try "The Secret Kingdom," by the absurd author of "The Bayswater Miracle." No doubt the works of this writer are not food for babes; but such of us as have attained years of discretion cannot fail to be tickled by this curious and very original skit.

Mr. Richardson takes a wide range. He makes merciless fun of what I have sometimes in these pages called the Zenda school of novelist. He makes still more merciless fun of writers of the "Rita" type, who affect to expose the vices of a class of people with whom they are at most but imperfectly acquainted; and he pokes the most merciless of all his jokes at Sherlock Holmes himself!

Perhaps the part about Sherlock is the funniest of all. The unfolding of the secret—namely, that the supposed great detective is hopelessly insane, and that Watson is his keeper—is done with so delightful a seriousness, and has such an air of probability withal, that it was altogether too much for my solemnity!

But perhaps, after all, I ought to be more guarded in recommending this book. It is not everybody who likes nonsense of this particular kind. Perhaps it would be a kindness to give in this place the opening paragraphs as a sample of style.

"The author desires to express his gratitude to the various chorus-girls, second footmen, and kitchen-maids who have kindly placed at his disposal much valuable information as to the manners and customs of society.

"Anybody who cannot understand this book had better not try."

At the first page we encounter a wondrous map of Numania, in the style of Rudyard Kipling's map of the turbid Amazon, and the appended explanation is a delicious parody of that writer's style. The countries adjacent to Numania are Numonia, Meningitis, and Ruritania (in which latter Zenda and Streslau are marked).

"The wormy things are rivers, or rivulets.

"The thing that has been crossed out at the bottom was meant to be a scale of miles, but it didn't work out properly and it worried me, so I erased it.

"The blots are accidents, and don't count.

"If you have bought this book, there is no reason why you should not cut out the map and pin it over your washhandstand, and learn geography while you are dressing, and so grow to be a wiser and brainier person. But if you have only got the book from a circulating library or borrowed it from a friend, don't do this, please."

And now, lest people should be saying, "Really, this is too nonsensical!" let us hasten to add that there is satire to flavour the nonsense; enough satire to set up a couple of ordinary satirists; some of it so very gentle and subtle that many might pass it by; a good deal that is neither gentle nor subtle. Also there is much sense scattered throughout, of which the following may be a sample:—

* By Frank Richardson. (Duckworth and Co.)

"One ought only to speak of women whom one knows really well by their pet names. But somehow one gets into the habit of doing so about people who are notorious or famous—it's pretty much the same thing, nowadays. Although one may never have travelled by the Tube, one calls it the Tube, and not the Central London Railway. Pet names aren't always pet names. Sometimes they are terms of abuse."

Plenty more things like that, just strewn about.

G. M. R.

Our Seasons.

We women have four seasons, like the year;
Our Spring is in our lightsome girlish days,
When the heart laughs within us for sheer joy;
Summer is when we love and are beloved;
Autumn when some young thing with tiny hands
And rosy cheeks, and flossy, tendrilled locks,
Is wantoning about us day and night;
And Winter is when those we loved have perished,
For the heart ices then.
Some miss one season, some another; this
Shall have them early—and that late.

Baily.

Change.

Life is not all. One day it shall be all—
Life, love, and rest;
But now, the groping hands; the unanswered call—
The bitter quest.
Death is not all. No life that death could hold
Of good or ill,
Completes to us, when we are still and cold,
What life did not fulfil.
But there is life past life; beyond all death,
Where promised things shall be;
Where groping hands hold firmest faith,
And dimmest eyes shall see.

ALEX. J. GRANT, in the *Sunday Strand*.

What to Read.

"Innocencies: a Book of Verse." Katharine Tynan.

"The Lyceum Annual, 1906." By the most prominent Women Authors of the World.

"In Japanese Hospitals during War Time." By Mrs. Richardson.

"The Lone Child." By T. B. Clegg.

Coming Events.

January 1st.—New Year's Day.

January 2nd and 3rd.—Christmas Entertainment, Great Hall, St. Bartholomew's Hospital. Tea and coffee 7.30. Mr. Stephen Townesend in David Garrick, 8.15.

January 6th.—Meeting of Executive Committee, Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses, 431, Oxford Street, 4.30 p.m.

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