

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"BARNACLES."*

The quaint style in which this book is written will make it very attractive to many readers. We are reminded of the fantastic writing of Borrow in "Lavengro;" that it is written with a powerful pen is self-evident. We suppose that it would not appeal to a large class of readers, but it must delight many who have the instinct for good literature.

"Benjamin had a complexion studded with little fiery nobs, and from the days of his first trousers was nicknamed 'Barnacles.' He was now very tall, loose knitted and had a gawky air, and went with a stoop. But his eyes behind the spectacles which he wore were blue as the spaces on a red sunset sky."

At an early age he conceived a passion for the violin. He had need of the pound sterling to buy a better fiddle. Wherefore we find this ardent musician attached to one of his father's sheep by a rope, and both about to take the road from the battered gate to the market at Paisley. "Come, come my sheep, I think we have the whole wide world to cross. Foolish sheep! Do hurry. To-day the fiddle, or never. If I fail I will bury my heart in this farm."

Having disposed of the sheep and bought his fiddle, Barnacles had to reckon with his father, and it ended with his being cast adrift in the wide world.

After a while he took refuge with Skelly, the fish hawker, and wee Kitchener, and the old man, his father, Hector, an ancient mariner. The pathetic character of the half-childish old man is one of the most appealing in the book. Two desires he has—one, his old-age pension, and the other a reefer coat with brass buttons.

The old man turned and looked at Barnacles.

"Are ye a scholar?" he quavered.

"I've been at the University."

The old man rose, his body trembling with both age and excitement.

"May be," he quavered, "Ye could win for me my auld-age pension. I'm ower seventy," he sighed deeply: the log's runnin' out fast; ninety degrees West is the Port. Let go the anchor, Mate, ninety West an' the sun goes down."

His proud old spirit longed to be independent of his son's food and shelter, although Skelly was devoted to him.

He looked over his shoulder with the air of a hunted animal.

"I'm no wastin' the fire when I'm sittin' at it. It wad be burnin' onywy." The rain broke and crashed on the window. The old man, almost doubled, made a dart at his son. "It's a wild day, Skelly; I don't think I'll bide at the close mooth the nicht."

"If ye daur," answered Skelly, shaking a hammer at him. "I'll put the hems on ye."

"Did ye hear thou?" he whispered. "I'll no bide at the close the nicht; he'll put the hems

on me if I dae; is he no a guid son? I'll just sit down at the fire-en. The coal wad be burnin' onywy."

The burial of the "wee wean," an illegitimate child, is described with powerful and tender appeal.

"You behold Skelly cursing Parochialism and offering his herring box. He will wash it and paint it and lay it fit for a baby in the offertory of the chancel of death."

The girl wheeled from the bed like a tigress,

"Is my bonnie wee wean to be buried in a herrin' box? Nancy Fish had a white coffin for her ane. She sobbed and lifted her haggard eyes to the cob-webbed windows as if the patch of visible sky were hung with white coffins."

The terrible threat of the girl. "I'm gawn whaur I'll get the price of a white coffin," drives Skelly and Barnacles to resort to many devices till the price of a white coffin is achieved and deposited in a common grave where already a big black coffin lay.

"It's better so, Skelly. The white coffin is in the arms of a big one. Perhaps a childless woman lies there, and in the Great Day, when she wakens up, she will gather the wee waif to her breast."

The whole of this chapter is a gem.

Wee Kitchener's talks with Barnacles are very charming.

"Are the blue eggs no awfu' bonnie. Wull they be blue birds?"

"No, black."

"Oo't o' blue eggs?"

There are passages that set this book far apart from mediocrity. H. H.

VERSE.

"And many strokes, though with a little axe,
Hew down and fell the hardest timbered oak."
—Henry VI.

WORD FOR THE WEEK.

"The moment you begin a general enfranchisement on the lines of State service, you are brought face to face with another most formidable proposition. What are you to do with the women?"

"... It is true they cannot fight in the gross, material sense, with guns and rifles, but they are doing work that men performed before, they are serving the State, and are aiding in the prosecution of the War in the most effective way possible. And what is more. They say when the War comes to an end, when these abnormal and to a large extent transitory conditions cease to be, when the process of industrial reconstruction is to be set on foot, they will have special claims to a voice in the many questions which will arise directly affecting their interests, and possibly meaning to them large displacements of labour.

"I say to the House quite candidly, as a life-long opponent of woman suffrage, I cannot deny that claim."—*The Right Honble. H. H. Asquith.*

* By J. Macdougall Hay. Constable: London.

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