

BOOK OF THE MONTH.

"THE GREAT VALLEY." *

In this age of the prostitution of literature we should be profoundly grateful to Miss Mary Johnston for contributing to fiction such a noble, inspiring and able work as "The Great Valley."

One turns with a sigh of relief from the sordid sex novel to the romance which utters nothing base during the whole of its long telling—not a whit too long.

It is of the "Seven Years' War," and is the story of three generations of settlers in Virginia from the period when the Scottish minister and his family escaping from the narrow bigotry of the land of their birth, sought as they believed a religious freedom in the new country.

John Selkirk, aged forty-six, a dreamer, who could act upon his dream; his wife, Jeannie, a fair-haired, apple-cheeked woman full of faults and winsomeness, who ruled him for his own good through a range of small matters; Kirstie Mackay, his sister, and their four children in the year 1735 set sail in the *Prudence* in search of that new life.

The child, Elizabeth, asks her father on the voyage: "Tell me a story of the bonny house we're going to build."

"It'll be of logs and much, I'm thinking, lassie, like the houses in the oak forest and by the lochs that our ain forefathers buidled!

"There will be fairies?"

"There'll be hard work—but do you never forget, bairnie, that the Unseen doesn't stop at fairies."

"Will the fairies have come from Scotland?"

Selkirk smiled on her. "They come from your heart and head, my bairn, so wherever you are there they are, too. Do not forget with your spinning and paddling and running and crooking your finger to the small folk that the true story is the soul's widening and lifting."

A wonderful description is given of the sixty leagues' journey across country to the Great Valley—Burke's Tract in New Virginia.

It was Colonel Burke who had acquired a large grant of land, and the law required that he must provide so many settlers, to which John Selkirk and his family belonged.

An arresting chapter is devoted to his initiation by Colonel Burke before starting on their adventure, and it was then that John Selkirk first touched on the vital point.

"I would know about the Indians."

"The Indians?" Colonel Burke straightened up from the map. Everyone into whose head the Great Valley had entered must know about the Indians. So now the Scots minister and his family had come to it.

Selkirk asks: "Will he be asked to put them forth from lands they have held, God knows how long? In my life, Colonel Burke, I've seen a good deal of putting forth of the helpless by the powerful. I would not cross over into that camp."

But later on in the history the gentle old man, who championed their cause, is shot dead by the red men, and his daughter, Elizabeth, by now married to Colonel Burke's son, is carried by them into captivity.

The massacre of the old minister is one of the most touching passages in the book.

Suddenly he heard the bleat of a lamb. He turned again and heard it, a distressful sound. Extreme solitariness breathed around, above, below.

Something like a cool breath seemed to touch his cheeks and crisp his hair. His heart changed its beat. Yet it was not alarm. The lamb cried again most pitifully. "He is lost and caught somehow in the thorns," he thought.

The bleat came from this direction and that.

"My lamb I do not understand you," he said.

He had not gone far when something, he knew not what,

bred a thought. But the Indian who had been drawing others with that cry was sure of aim. The minister reached the pasturage and began to climb.

But the bullet given by the Frenchman to the Indian reached his heart.

Charming is the description of Conan's wooing, as he meets Elizabeth driving her cow home from the pasture.

"It snows," she said. "Winter now, and byre and fold away from the wolves."

He moved beside her. "Elizabeth——"

"Aye, Conan."

"You are all golden in your grey cloak in the snow."

She turned her eyes to him.

He put his hands to hers. "How can you help but know I love you? It's pealing through the mountains; it's dropping roses in the snow."

"Aye, Conan!"

Each held in arms the other, the snow falling about them.

With terrible force and realism the dreaded invasion of the red men into the Great Valley is described.

The wholesale massacre and scalping of the settlers the carrying off into captivity of Elizabeth and the little Eileen, the wonderful account of their journey through the mountains before reaching the Shawnee camp, the merciless attitude of their captors are written with singular force.

The Indian who knew most English used their first camping-place to impress his captives with the hopelessness of their position.

There was fierce triumph over Burke's Land—he made them understand that.

"If they had kindred they were dead. Dead. Shot, tomahawked, scalped. Or to live with Shawnees and be Shawnees. Never English any more! Burke's Land where Shawnees were once killed. Now English killed! What say you white woman?"

Elizabeth answered: "The Great Spirit says, 'If you show mercy, you will have mercy.'"

The Indian struck his hands together and laughed.

"Ha, show good she say, have good. *She* say that, white skin, pale face, *English!*"

After two years' captivity the heroic Elizabeth escapes with little Eileen, and after weeks of indescribable suffering and thrilling adventure reaches Burke's Land, and where she beheld Conan, her husband, whom she believed dead.

She and Conan stood embraced, they gave, they took their tidings, their history; the mists lifted, the great sun shone. Eileen had her own private belief that it was Heaven.

H. H.

COMING EVENTS.

November 13th.—Annual Meeting of the Grand Council, National Council of Nurses of Great Britain. 431, Oxford Street, London, W. 3 p.m.

November 19th.—Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, President of the College, will speak on The British College of Nurses at the Royal British Nurses' Association Club. 194, Queen's Gate, S.W.1. 3 p.m.

November 19th.—Meeting of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, 20, Portland Place, W. 2.30 p.m.

November 19th and 20th.—Annual Sale, Nurses' Missionary League, 135, Ebury Street, Victoria, S.W.1. 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

November 20th.—Meeting of the Council, British College of Nurses, 431, Oxford Street, London, W. 3 p.m.

November 27th.—Annual Meeting, Scottish Nurses' Association. The President, Mrs. Strong, will give an Address on The British College of Nurses, Scottish Nurses' Club, 205, Bath Street, Glasgow. 2.30 p.m.

December 6th.—Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, President of the College, will speak on The British College of Nurses at Charing Cross Hospital, W.C. 8.30 p.m.

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