

until doubts assail her mind, hesitation creeps into her beliefs, and temptation comes to her but in no crude or commonplace way, and she struggles through to knowledge by the broad path of life and pain. The rest of the characters are subordinate to the aims and purpose of the book, but so alive and individual are they all, we feel there is not one we could dispense with; and though the trend of the book drifts towards a tragedy we feel could no more be avoided than old age or death, through it all runs an intensely human interest engendered by richness of thought and fancy.

In another of her novels, "Doreen," she writes with dignity and pathos of life amongst the Irish poor, and is keenly alive to their misery as well as to the selfish greed and callous indifference that was all too apparent amongst the landowners and their stewards.

Personal contact with the peasantry showed her many good traits in their characters which onlookers were unable to discover, and one can but admire the persistent manner in which she brings forward the grievances of a people who have won her admiration and sympathy and to better whose cause seems to be the predominating theme of this novel. This book, if read with an unbiased mind, might tend to produce a better understanding of, and more sympathy with, the difficult problem of Irish discontent and restlessness.

At any rate, as she herself remarked, "if it does one least little bit of real good for Ireland, I will not grudge the bad effect it will have on my reputation as a novelist."

Three more of her books are "Hope the Hermit," "In the Golden Days" and "To Right the Wrong"; historical novels of the 17th century in which her descriptions of life and manners among two classes of society are charmingly simple and lifelike, and are mingled with events and characters of real historical importance which invest these stories with much interest and truthfulness, and she seldom falls into the error, too common nowadays, of allowing sensational plot to overshadow making her novels over-exciting, or of filling them with dramatic adventures and fantastic rescues which are as unreal as they are romantic.

Those who like to wander in the quiet paths of fiction will find in "Hope the Hermit" that she recalls many picturesque scenes of rural farmsteads and villages in our lovely lake district, and though the plot of the book takes place 200 years ago, the scenery has not changed, and the familiar mountains, woods and streams are as charming as ever and we find the fair face of nature reflected for us, in impassionate prose.

Two more of her books I would have liked to mention more fully had space permitted are her last novel "Way-faring Men," with its pleasant descriptions of Highland Haunts and mountains and its familiar pictures of Scottish home life, and above all her short story the "Autobiography of a Slander," which, personally, I consider the finest piece of work she ever wrote; it tells with dramatic force how far-reaching may become the evil wrought by an injudicious word of mere idle gossip.

Her best known and most prominent character, Luke Raeburn, is limned skillfully and graphically. His youthful ideas and principles have been thwarted and distorted through parental harshness and want of sympathy, but he becomes a large-souled man, and his actions are those of a nature highly-strung and nervous, but not intentionally wicked and his quiet serenity and kindly patience make it impossible for us to doubt his integrity. Those who persecuted and murdered him thought of course they were upholding Christianity, but Christ's doctrines can be defended in no such way. She displays much skill in developing a tragedy which appears as the natural outcome of character and circumstances, and is in no way forced or manufactured.

The events and characters taken from history, the scenes of life and manners at the court of Charles II, Cromwell, and William and Mary are most interesting and are absolutely consistent with historical truth: her two most notable characters, John Hampten and Algernon Sydney are invested with much power and dignity, though no liberties are taken with the facts of their lives, and her description of the beheading of Sydney on Tower Hill is given with an eloquence and pathos that seems to make the whole scene pass re-enacted before our eyes.

Her intimate knowledge of Old Newgate with all its awful realities and miseries and its motley collection of inmates gathered together from all classes of society, is truly realistic and she treats this gruesome theme with a delicacy that only makes more poignant the horrors of the situation. Her description of her hero's first night in his cell and the speechless agony and despair of a human soul writhing at the thought of life-long imprisonment among such surroundings, makes one fully realise that "Sorrow is sorrow! and must be borne, whether in the strength and hope of Heaven or in the impotent despair of Hell!" Later on the details of his marvellous escape under the semblance of death are given in words of thrilling interest.

Another character which stands out distinguished above all others is the conspicuous figure and strong personality of "Donovan." He appears first as a clever, proud, self-contained lad, unjustly cast upon the world penniless, he battles against dire poverty and terrific temptation, but he emerges through much tribulation, as a vigorous and noble man. His upright character and high principle appeals irresistibly—by its universal brotherliness—to all her readers.

To her heroines she allots the characteristics of gentleness, kindness, patience and modesty, which she considered above all others were the qualities which constituted a lovable woman. But to Erica Raeburn, more than this is given; she possesses the vitality and nobleness of spirit engendered by years of self denial and devotion to others. She silently effaces the desire of her heart and manfully plods on, allowing no bitterness to creep in, but faces unflinchingly the greyness of a crippled life.

Edna Lyall's private life, though quiet and unobtrusive, was sincerely and earnestly helpful to those around her, and she affords a retired and domestic home life. Even as a child she was fond of reading romances and relating them to those around her, and like a true writer she was *always* writing and cultivating her strong powers of observation, often collecting the material for her next novel before she had finished the one in hand. She possessed imagination, poignant feelings, a quicker perception of the true and beautiful, and an immense amount of steady common-sense. She was eminently of a kindly nature, full of sympathy for those about her, both in their sorrow and their joys, and this makes itself manifest in many of her novels for she seems quite in harmony with the best heroines of her own novels.

Though of a shy nature she made friendships far and near, and besides Mr. Bradlaugh she numbered amongst them Mr. Gladstone and Edith Wynne, the great singer, upon the facts of whose life she founded one of her later novels "Doreen," a singer.

By the moral influence of her books, she encourages charity, she upholds brotherly kindness, she makes the manners of her heroes and heroines both courteous and kind, and she keeps them true to high ideals and courageous efforts.

M.B.McK.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)