

## THE LITERATURE OF THE KAILYARD

THE revolt of the provinces against the centre—against London—which we all know vaguely as the “Home Rule” movement, is a phenomenon which time has long since robbed of novelty ; and to say that in letters an analogous tendency has been perceptible for some years is to assert a truism. Yet the literary impulse has been more tenacious of life than the political, and seems very far indeed from exhaustion. Scarce a locality in these isles from Land’s End to the Moray Firth has lacked a recorder of its darling idiosyncrasies. Cornwall has striven with Galloway to catch the public ear, and Troy Town with Thrums. In this cry of mingled dialects the Caledonian note has rung out with its customary clearness. The penetrating quality of that modulation is, indeed, rarely to be mistaken in any concert ; and it is a fact that Mr. J. M. Barrie is fairly entitled to look upon himself as *pars magna*, if not *pars maxima*, of the Great Kailyard Movement. If to-day in Scotland hardly the humblest rag is without its study of native life, and if ne’er a Free Kirk probationer, too modest to aspire to the smug heresies and the complacent latitudinarianism of his teachers, but manfully resolves that he too will storm the world with his *Cameos from the Cowcaddens*, or his *Glimpses of the Goosedubs*, it is Mr. Barrie’s doing. Nay, his writings are eagerly devoured in England by people who, on the most charitable hypothesis, may possibly understand one word in three of his dialogue : and to the curious superstitions which the Southron breast has long nourished with regard to Scotland must now be added a new group of equally well-grounded beliefs ; as, for example, that the Auld Lights formed a large majority of the people of Scotland, and that the absorbing interest, if not the main occupation, of nine true-born Scotsmen out of ten is chatter about church officers, parleyings about precentors, babble about beadles, and maunderings about manses.

Yet, after all, ’twere the merest churlishness to ignore the admirable qualities which distinguish Mr. Barrie’s best work. There are papers in the *Auld Licht Idylls* and in *A Window in Thrums* which Galt

himself might have been proud to write. And even *The Little Minister*—that most gallant and ambitious failure—how much rare stuff its pages contain! Whatever else it may be, 'tis readable, and the most careless catches an impression from its scenes which time cannot efface. The book lies not convenient to our hand; yet the atmosphere of the book returns at the call of memory; and we insensibly review its successive pictures from the beginning, where Mr. Barrie so artfully sets the tone of the story by describing the little minister's boyish recollection of how another minister sang "a mouthful" after giving out the psalm, to the last great tableau (so some esteem it) of all. Yet Mr. Barrie, for all his genius, may, without any grave impropriety, be termed the founder of a special and notable department in the "parochial" school of fiction; though we do not imply that his disciples have all consciously striven to imitate his methods or to attain precisely his ends. They may even assure us, agreeably to the custom of our country, that they never read a single line of his composition; and that assurance shall be gladly accepted in the spirit in which it is offered. Nevertheless, Mr. Barrie is the master; he began to play the game; he whetted the public taste. Of his followers we shall draw attention to two only: Mr. Crockett and Mr. Ian Maclaren. The latter is late in the field, but has achieved, apparently, a measure of success which justifies some notice being taken of his efforts. These are, in the meantime (for he threatens more), confined to a single volume bearing the irrelevant title of *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush*; and it may suffice to note that its characteristics are practically identical with those of the bulk of Mr. Crockett's work, with this distinction: that Mr. Maclaren has a diseased craving for the pathetic. He is never really happy save when he is wringing your heart, and a plenteous distillation of plum-tree gum from the eyes, would, we suspect, be his dearest reward.

It is refreshing to turn from his studied pathos to the opportunities of cheerful intercourse which this "auctorial Bushman" has afforded to an admiring and reverent interviewer. Mr. Maclaren, it should seem, is "tall, strongly built, with clean-carved, decisive features, and the steady, alert eyes which testify to a firm will and a perfectly poised nervous organisation." Moreover the interviewer, thanks to him, enjoyed the pleasures of companionship with "some of the best representatives of Liverpool culture," as well as with "the three little lads who made a bright house brighter by their presence," and with (O

crowning joy!) "the three tiny tawny dormice of which one of them was the proud proprietor—trustful little creatures who would rest," &c Here, surely, are credentials sufficient to vouch for a thousand *Bonny Brier Bushes*, even though "a firm will and a perfectly poised nervous organisation" were not notorious passports to literary fame.

We are not aware what Mr. Crockett's merits may be in the matter of dormice, nor is our ignorance like to be soon enlightened. For, though "it is no trouble to me to talk," as he admits, he adds, with a dignified determination (all too rare in this tattling age) to baulk the indecent curiosity of the public, "for the future I shall only give interviews occasionally. Three or four a year ought to be sufficient for any purpose which may be served by them." It is comfortable, therefore, to recall that he has been "took up" (in a literary sense) by Mr. Lang; that he had won the good will of the late Mr. Stevenson, whose kindly nature seems to have been incapable of resisting the appeal of anything Scots—from a whaup to a novelist—and to whom Mr. Crockett's "Letter Declaratory" prefixed to the second edition of *The Stickit Minister* is a model of uneasy familiarity; and finally that (on the interviewer's authority) he "has for years enjoyed the intimate friendship of many of our most eminent writers." Perhaps, if he goes on, he may rival Mr. Ian Maclaren, and be able to give some curious impertinent "the privilege of meeting at his dining table" "some of the best representatives of Penicuik culture." At all events, he has been "terribly pressed for work both by publishers and editors," and has "better stories in his head than any he has told." It is stale news that the sweetest songs are the songs unsung. We, unluckily, are tied down to what has seen the light. Setting aside *Mad Sir Uchtred* and the incredible *Play-Actress*, together with a foolish contribution or two to stillborn Radical compilations, we are to consider him as the author of *The Stickit Minister*, a collection of short stories, *The Lilac Sunbonnet*, a bucolic love tale, and *The Raiders*, a shambling, slovenly romance of adventure, without a single "evidence of design," save the occasional interjection of a perfunctory, "as you shall presently hear."

One limitation of Mr. Crockett's art, be it said at the outset, is so manifest as to require no laboured demonstration. He is hopelessly at sea when dealing with what Mr. Gladstone, conveniently and compendiously, calls the "classes." Lady Grizel in *The Raiders*, and Winsome's grandmother in the *Sunbonnet*, are supposed to be old-fashioned Scots ladies of gentle blood. In reality, their speech and

behaviour display the refinement of a fish-wife; while the laird's daughter, in *The Stickit Minister*, who sets her cap at the new parish minister, and endeavours to atone for her father's coldness by a wholly ultroneous civility, speaks the blameless, though stilted, jargon associated with the virtuous aristocracy in *The Family Herald*, or in the popular page of that uncompromising realist, Miss Annie Swan. This weakness is shared by Mr. Ian Maclaren, whose excursions into gentility are far from profitable. Mr. Barrie himself—that relentlessly acute observer—is not wholly free from it. Who does not recollect the brisk Stichomythia in *The Little Minister*? “Are you there, Mackenzie?” “No, Scrymgeour” (or Gemmell, or something). “Have you the lantern, Mackenzie?” “Here it is, Gemmell” (or Scrymgeour). “Where, Mackenzie?” “Just here, Scrymgeour.” And so on, every word of which might have been written by a man who had just mastered the important fact that the classes are in the habit of dispensing with the use of those titles of honour (such as “Mr.”) which the more punctilious convention of the masses rigidly exacts. The Chroniclers of the Kailyard are ill at ease in the flower garden, though they wisely avoid the glaring errors perpetrated, in the zealous striving for vivid touches, by rash men like Dr. Conan Doyle: who makes a scout tell his master to ring the bell if he wants anything, and describes the tricks at picquet as overlapping one another.

If there is any special excellence which Mr. Crockett's admirers would probably with one voice claim for him, that excellence is humour: “kindly,” “genial,” “racy,” “wholesome,” “virile” humour, they would doubtless term it, as their manner is. No Scots book, to be sure, is complete without it. Here, then, are specimens of his gift. The first one belongs plainly to that well-known and somewhat seedy species of humour—the clerical, and is vastly well for a minister of the Gospel:—“The curse that Richard Maxwell sent back is remembered yet in the hill country, and his descendants mention it with a kind of pride. It was considered as fine a thing as the old man ever did since he dropped profane swearing and took to anathemas from the Psalms—which served just as well” (*Raiders*, p. 109). The inspiration of the next sample is not far to seek:—“Once there was a herd of cows in Parton, up Peathill way, that ate a man—chased him and ate him bodily. Their reason was, because the man belonged to a different denomination. But that is not my story” (*ibid.*, p. 183). Here is a fragment of exquisite fancy:—“The subject of her mouth, though a

tempting one, we refuse to touch. It has already wrecked three promising reputations" (*Sunbonnet*, p. 19). And the idyllic flavour of the harlequinade surely lingers about this :—"There was a long silence; then a ringing sound, sudden and sharp, and Ebie Farrish fell inexplicably from the axe-chipped hag-clog, which he had rolled up to sit upon. Ebie had been wondering for more than an hour what would happen if he put his arm round Jess Kissock's waist. He knew now" (*ibid.*, p. 80). Mr. Jerome, sure, must writhe with jealousy as he reads the following :—"The first rook sailed slowly overhead. He was seeking the early worm, but that animal thought the rate of mortality high and was staying indoors" (*ibid.*, p. 90). But the best is yet to come :—"Andra Kissock indicated the culprit once more with the stubby great toe of his left foot. It would have done Ralph too much honour to be pointed at with the hand. Besides, it was a way that Andra had at all times. He indicated persons and things with that part of him which was most convenient at the time. He could point with his elbow stuck sideways at an acute angle in a manner that was distinctly libellous. He could do it menacingly with his head, and the indication contemptuous of his left knee was a triumph. But the finest and most conclusive of all was his great toe as an index-finger of scorn. It stuck out apart from all the others, red and uncompromising. a conclusive affidavit of evil conduct" (*ibid.*, p. 169). In this masterly combination of delicacy with robustness, Mr. Crockett has fairly surpassed himself. After so mighty an effort, the graceful and ingenious wit of calling a horse an "equine" and a parish minister the Revd. "Erasmus Teends" falls a little flat; and even "that upper end which is devoted to imports" seems a less charming and happy periphrasis to denote a cow's mouth than it might had it proceeded from a less Titanic author. For the rest, the episode of the wooing of Saunders Mowdiewort (more "wut"! ) is mere dulness; Andra Kissock's progress to school is as pure as Barrie its author can brew; and the few good stories which enliven Mr. Crockett's pages have already amused the world in Dean Ramsay's collection. Mr. Ian Maclaren, too, would fain be a merry as well as a pathetic man, and it is curious to observe how accurately he has caught the mechanical trick of the thing :—"Domsie and Whinnie discussed the weather with much detail before they came in sight of George, but it was clear that Domsie was charged with something weighty, and even Whinnie felt that his own treatment of the turnip crop was lacking in repose" (*B.B.B.*, p. 12).

Mark the fidelity to the Barrie convention :—" It was good manners in Drumtochty to feign amazement at the sight of a letter, and to insist that it must be intended for some other person. When it was finally forced upon one, you (*sic*) examined the handwriting at various angles and speculated about the writer. Some felt emboldened, after these precautions, to open the letter, but this haste was considered indecent " (*ibid.*, p. 21). "The ordinary course of life, with fine air and contented minds, was to do a full share of work till seventy, and then to look after 'orra jobs' well into the eighties, and to 'slip awa' within sight of ninety. Persons above ninety were understood to be acquitting themselves with credit, and assumed airs of authority, brushing aside the opinions of seventy as immature, and confirming their conclusions with illustrations drawn from the end of last century" (*ibid.*, p. 231). So long as the humour is of this artificial kind, with a bit from Mr. Dickens here, a bit from Mr. Barrie there, a bit from Mr. Kipling somewhere else, and a dash of the "new" humorists everywhere, Mr. Ian Maclaren gallantly holds his own. But, unluckily, he seems to have no stomach for rollicking; he is incapable of those flights on broad and manly pinion (so to speak) in which Mr. Crockett revels; he rises to no lyric ecstasy at the thought of a stubby, red, uncompromising, great toe. In other matters, Mr. Crockett may be strained or laboured; but give him a sore "dowp" and he unbends at once; add a man sitting down on a prickly whin and he is unaffectedly joyous and gleeful; while as for the consummate jest of a wife correcting her husband with a "besomshank"—why, it is so excruciating that there is nought to be done save to roar with mirth, and to lug it in, and dwell lovingly upon it, on every possible occasion. Such are the simple and primitive diversions of a Free Kirk minister.

But even Mr. Crockett is not always bending the bow of "manly" humour. He has his serious—his very serious—moments; he has his strenuous attempts at fine writing. We confine ourselves to the *Sunbonnet*, and we encounter not a few masterstrokes: thoroughly "worked up," no doubt, to borrow his language to the interviewer. "Never before had the youth come within that delicate *aura* of charm which radiates from the bursting bud of the finest womanhood. Ralph Peden had kept his affections ascetically virgin. His nature's finest juices had gone to feed the brain, yet all the time his heart had waited tremulously expectant of the revealing of a mystery. Winsome Charteris had come so suddenly into his life, that the universe seemed

new-born in a day. He sprang at once from the thought of woman as only an unexplained part of the creation, to the conception of her (meaning, thereby, Winsome Charteris) as an angel who had not quite lost her first estate" (p. 51). What subtle psychological analysis! No wonder Ralph went northward "wearing Winsome's parting kiss on his brow like an insignia (*sic*) of knighthood"! No wonder "the first authentic call of the spring time for her"—the song of the thrush, to wit—"coursed through her blood, quickened her pulse, and enlarged the pupil of her eye till the clear germander blue of the iris grew moist and dark"! There's physiological analysis, equally irresistible! But our "auctorial Sunbonnet-maker" is no less successful in depicting the beauties of nature. "The world paused, finger on lip, saying, 'Hush!' to Winsome as she stepped over the threshold into the serenely breathing morning air, while the illimitable sky ran farther and farther back as the angels drew up the blinds from the windows of heaven." *As the angels drew up the blinds from the windows of heaven!* Chaste, touching, and domestic simile! Only to be equalled by the comparison of a sweetheart's laughter to "a bell ringing for the fairies' breakfast"! Why not a gong booming for the fairies' boiled eggs and finnon-haddock? Mark, too, with what unassuming command of technicalities Mr. Crockett handles the matchless colouring of nature. "The indigo-grey of the sky was receding, and tinging towards the east with an imperceptibly graded lavender which merged beyond the long shaggy outline of the pine ridge into a wash of pale lemon yellow" (p. 108). "And he stood watching Winsome Charteris who looked past him into a distance, moistly washed with tender ultramarine ash" (p. 115). "The sun shone on the russet tassels of the larches, and the deep sienna boles of the Scotch firs. The clouds which rolled fleecy and white in piles and crenulated bastions of cumulus, lighted the eyes of man and maid as they went onward noiselessly over the crisp piny carpet of fallen fir-needles" (p. 116). We know not whether more to admire these crenulated bastions of prave 'orts, or that complete mastery of the terminology of the child's paint-box, which enables an author thus to polish off the beauties of hill and dale.

Both Mr. Crockett's humour, however, and Mr. Crockett's fine writing might be excused or palliated: and we had let him pass on his road, a' God's name, to popularity and pence, but for the manner in which he has seen proper to handle what Mr. Jowett described as "that illusion of the feelings commonly called love." We are well aware that

at the present day considerable license is granted to an author in this regard. He may record words, and may portray behaviour, which would have shocked our grandfathers, though he could scarce transgress the ample limits permitted by the loose code of morals which prevailed a century ago. If the present age imagines that it has been the first to betray a taste for "warm" plays and "warmer" novels (we thank thee, Mrs. Norris, for the word !), the present age is very much mistaken. But the very fact that authors are allowed a free hand imposes upon them a doubly stringent obligation to certain literary virtues: to tact, to reticence, to good feeling, to discretion. This obligation Mr. Crockett consistently ignores; to these virtues he is a total stranger. He touches courtship and love-making but to disfigure them with his heavy hand; he opens the sluices to an irresistible flood of nauseous and nasty philandering. We do not particularly object to being told that "Winsome's light summer dress touched his hand and thrilled the lad to his remotest nerve centres"; or that "little ticking pulses drummed in her head," and "a great yearning came to her to let herself drift out on a sea of love"; or that "the dammed-back blood-surge drave thundering in his ears"; or that "strange, nervous constrictions played at 'cat's cradle' about their hearts"; or even that "maidenly tremors, delicious in their uncertainty, coursed along her limbs and through all her being." Such modes of expression, clumsy and inartistic though they be, are but the slang of the day; like the reiteration in the *Sunbonnet*, of the fact that the female villain had Pictish ancestors. But we turn to *The Raiders*, Chapter XXXIV, and we read: "She turned and came near to me and stood very close against me in a way that was sweet to me, but I knew that she did not wish me to touch her then, but only to stand so. Thus we remained a considerable while till my heart became very full, aching within me to comfort her. *Which at last I did with satisfaction to both of us, and the time sped. . . .* So then we looked about for a place to sit down, for it behoved us to talk together, as it were, for the last time (for at least a night and a day). There was but one great chair in all that room, though there was much tapestry and some high tables and corner aumries. So we sat down on it with great content. . . . 'Hae ye a' the conserves lickit aff the sweetcake yet?'"—[It was the high-bred Lady Grizel who spake]—"cried a voice from the door, which opened just a little ajar. . . . Now we sat in one chair, and though I do not consider myself a clever fellow and I had no experience, that was good enough

for me. There is nothing to report of the next half-hour. 'It's my turn, May,' said Lady Grizel, who had been coughing at the door for five minutes. 'I'm whiles ta'en wi' the hoast, but I like a bit quiet hour at e'en wi' a blythe lad as weel as ony.'" This is pretty well, but nothing to what you find in the *Sunbonnet*, Mr. Crockett's favourite book, in which "much of his own life is bound up," and which his nature's finest juices have, no doubt, gone to feed. Here are some passages extracted from Chapter XXXIII of that work:—"Then because there is nothing more true and trustful than the heart of a good woman, or more surely an inheritance from the maid-mother of the sinless garden than her way of showing that she gives her all, Winsome laid her either hand on her lover's shoulders and drew his face down to hers, laying her lips to his of her own free will and accord, without shame in giving or coquetry of refusal, in that full kiss of first surrender which a woman may give once but never twice in her life. . . . Before they had gone a mile the first strangeness had worn off. . . . At this point they paused. Exercise in the early morning is fatiguing. Only the unique character of these refreshing experiences induces the historian to put them on record. . . . Sitting on a wind-overturned tree trunk they entered upon their position with great practicality. Nature, with an unusual want of foresight, had neglected to provide a back to this sylvan seat, so Ralph attended to the matter himself. This shows that self-help is a virtue to be encouraged. . . . 'I think, dear,' said Ralph, 'you must after this make your letters so full of your love that there can be no mistake whom they are intended for.' 'I mean to,' said Winsome frankly. There was also some fine scenery at this point. . . . The scenery again asserted its claim to attention. Observation enlarges the mind and is, therefore, pleasant. . . . 'Your lips——' began Ralph, and paused. 'No, six is quite enough,' said Winsome after a while, mysteriously. Now she had only two and Ralph only two, yet with little grammar and no sense at all she said 'Six is enough.'" Here, in Mr. Squeers's immortal phrase, here's richness! Here's a perpetual flow of juicy bad-breeding which no American Evangelist ever surpassed! You can hear the Young Men's Sabbath Morning Fellowship Association snigger and the Young Women's Guild giggle as you read. The rest of Mr. Crockett's faults—the cynically careless and lazy construction of his plots, the sameness of his characters, his failure to create a single fictitious being neither ridiculous nor contemptible—everything, in a word, fades

from the mind, overwhelmed in this slough of knowing archness, of bottomless vulgarity. It is with a sense of relief that one passes from such trash to the clean and honest wit of Fielding and of Congreve.

The sad case of Mr. Crockett seems, in conclusion, to suggest two observations. The first is that, as we know and have attempted to depict him, he is almost wholly the result of the modern method of reviewing. Not only has he enjoyed the benefit of the ingenious system of log-rolling consistently practised by a portion of the so-called religious Press, but many other newspapers and reviews have conspired to overwhelm him with fulsome and exaggerated flattery. If the critics, instead of telling him that *The Stickit Minister* was "full of grace and charm," and that its stories were "racy of the soil, told with a masterly command of dialect and national characteristics"; instead of declaring that *The Raiders* was "a thoroughly enjoyable novel, full of fresh, original, and accurate pictures of life long gone by," that it abounded in "delightful incident and charming description," and that its author, "the Barrie of yesterday, is to-day a second Stevenson—and no bad second"; instead of slobbering over *The Lilac Sunbonnet* as "a charming love-story, bright, tender, and vivacious, marked by distinction of treatment, and steeped in the sweetness and freshness of the open air," or as "a love-story of the vintage of Eden, strong and sweet, and in the best sense elevating"; instead of asserting that "Nature's secrets hang on the very tip of Mr. Crockett's pen," and averring that they (the critics) rise from its perusal, their pulses "throbbing with a new sense of life, and with a fresh assurance that 'God's in His Heaven, All's right with the world'"—if, we say, instead of raving thus, the critics had been able and willing to do their plain duty, to detect and point-out the many glaring faults, to castigate as they deserved the offences against good taste, to persuade to the use of an equable and pleasant style, and to deter from flippancy, from "word-painting," and from clumsy and stupid meddling with the passions, all might have been comparatively well. A certain rude, undisciplined vigour which we seem occasionally to detect might have been turned into a proper channel, and Mr. Crockett might this day have been doing excellent and honest work in a less ambitious sphere in place of grating on one's nerves in every syllable he writes. But such regrets are now vain, for Mr. Crockett, forsaking that ministry to which he was ordained by the laying on of hands by the Presbytery, is persuaded that he has a "call" to literature. A call to "success,"

very likely, or to making money, or to the intimate friendship of eminent literary "cy'arkters"; but not, we take leave to assure him, a call to literature. Not of such as he, at all events, are the chosen. The same torrent of injudicious praise is being poured over Mr. Ian Maclaren, but, though its result will infallibly be to confirm him in his present courses, he discovers no vestige of that natural ability of a sort which makes one rather regret in Mr. Crockett's case that thorns have sprung up and choked it.

In the second, and last, place, it is worth while to pause and contemplate the Great Dissenting Interest taking to the *belles lettres*. It has long groaned under the aspersions of that sneering "buddy," Mr. Matthew Arnold, and has been endeavouring to acquire education and "culture" as expeditiously as possible. How valuable it must have found the *soi-disant* University Extension Scheme as a means of acquiring the appearance of knowledge without the reality, it is needless to point out. But man cannot live by penny-readings alone, and the Great Dissenting Interest has begun to batten upon fiction. The Dissenters have for some time, indeed, almost openly abandoned the doctrinal principles of their forefathers, which alone entitled their ethical views to respect, and, though they retain the snuffle and the whine of Tribulation Spintext, they seem rooted and grounded upon nothing save a bitter hatred of the Church of England. What, therefore, the ultimate consequences of the spread of fiction among them will be it were hazardous to speculate. But we have a shrewd suspicion that if this new wine be poured into the old Bottles, there can be but one result: the old Bottles will burst.

J. H. MILLAR.