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FICTION.

Lads' Love. By S. R. Crockett. (Bliss, Sands & Co.)

WHEN a writer has attained to the position enjoyed by Mr. Crockett he loses the right to claim indulgence at the hands of the critic; as he wins success so must his work be submitted to an examination proportionately more severe. Judging *Lads' Love*, therefore, by a high standard, we are compelled to discern, in the midst of much that is tender and touching, a certain crudity and want of finish which impel us to suspect that it has been produced with greater speed than a just regard for his art should have permitted. There is a certain looseness in the construction of the story; the characterisation is sometimes weak, as though consistency had been sacrificed to make way for an incident; and these are just the faults of a ready writer "scribing" for a too willing and an uncritical public. But when all is said and done, the tale is full of the kind of charm which Mr. Crockett's admirers expect. A youth of the artistic temperament is the hero, and there are three fair damsels, daughters of the soil. Of these the youngest, the Hempie, wears her skirts too short to be really interesting, though she is very fond of Alec, and they are accustomed to sit together upon opposite sides of the Wishing Well, throwing stones and turf at each other; "this we did because we despised love—or at least the silly kind which requires the sheltered and sequestered corners of orchards for its manifestation." But it was to Nance, the eldest, that Alec's heart was turned; and where he narrates the midnight intrusion of his hero into the society of the three sisters, and the audacious pertinacity which won him three kisses and his wager, Mr. Crockett is at his best. "If ye kiss as well as ye court, ye may try me wi' twa; and if I like them no that ill, I'll see if I canna gi'e ye the last back again, just to be rid o' ye"—this is Nance's pretty word of surrender. The Hempie becomes the guardian-angel of their loves, watching over Nance while Alec is studying at the medical school of Edinburgh, and guarding her against the machinations of the rich rascal Nathan, and from the beguilements of other lads. The connexion between this slender tale and the fates of Rab An'erson with his offspring, the De'il and the Hoolet, supplies occasion to a seduction, a marriage contract made valid by the presence of three witnesses of whom the parties were not aware, a poaching expedition and other melodramatic incidents, including an attempt at murder, not wholly ineffective, with the subsequent inquest and the appearance of the heroine equipped with a fancy dress and an Irish brogue. Some of the illustrations by Mr. Warwick Goble are dainty and clever; but, in spite of the picture which is placed opposite to p. 196, we are not yet convinced that ten feet is the most convenient distance from which to salute a lady's hand.

Quo Vadis: A Narrative of the Time of Nero.
By Henryk Sienkiewicz. Translated by
Jeremiah Curtin. (Dent.)

WE understand that *Quo Vadis* divides the suffrages of American novel-readers with Mr. Stimson's *King Noanett*. Henryk Sienkiewicz is a Pole who has already written a striking trilogy on the rise of the Slavonic power in Eastern Europe. The present novel deals with even more momentous *origines*, the spread of Christianity in the Rome of Nero. It has many of the normal qualities of Slavonic fiction, a certain rude vigour of conception and picturesque power over masses of detail, and a certain incapacity to discriminate or to use detail as the background for a plot of vital unity. The hero is a prætorian tribune, Vinicius by name, who becomes a Christian for love of the barbarian girl Lygia. But this love and this conversion leave us cold. Vinicius and Lygia fail to dominate their environment: as in so many an academic picture, human interest is smothered in archæology. Mr. Curtin rightly describes the book as a series of "opening scenes in the conflict of moral ideas with the Roman Empire." A series of scenes, not a novel. But the archæology, as such, is admirable. To the resources of an exhaustive and minute erudition the author adds a power of imagination which enables him to shape his lore into vivid and convincing descriptions. Impressed alike by the unexampled splendour and the unexampled corruption of Imperial Rome, he leads before us a pageant of gorgeous scenes: a morning bath, a banquet at Cæsar's palace, a revel at the Pool of Agrippa, Cæsar on a journey, Cæsar declaiming his verses at the burning of Rome, martyrdoms of Christians in the amphitheatre, the *Sarmentitii* in the gardens. Of the portraits which Herr Sienkiewicz essays the most successful are those of Petronius, the *arbiter elegantiarum*, distinguished among the obscene Neronian rabble not by any higher morality, but by the natural superiority of wit, good nature, and good taste; and Nero himself, the bloated Ahenobarbus, the histron emperor:

"He wore a white tunic, and a toga of amethyst colour, which cast a bluish tinge on his face. On his head was a laurel wreath. Since his departure from Naples he had increased notably in body. His face had grown wide; under his lower jaw hung a double chin, by which his mouth, always too near his nose, seemed to touch his nostrils. His bulky neck was protected, as usual, by a silk handkerchief, which he arranged from moment to moment with a white and fat hand grown over with red hair, forming as it were bloody stains, which he would not permit the epilatores to pluck. Since he had been told that to do so would bring trembling of the fingers and injure his lute-playing. Measureless vanity was depicted then, as at all times, on his face, together with tedium and suffering. On the whole, it was a face both terrible and silly. While advancing, he turned his head from side to side, blinking at times, and listening carefully to the manner in which the multitude greeted him."

With the Christians Herr Sienkiewicz is less successful. His Asiatic manner is not adequate to make us feel the peace of the

early Church as we feel it, for instance, in Marius the Epicurean. Peter and Paul, speaking Scriptural things which to a modern ear must inevitably sound like formulas, are only puppets. And therefore the contrast, which is the essence of the book as conceived, is not really attained: the one side is living, the other conventional.

Will Thou Have This Woman? By J. Maclaren Cobban. (Methuen.)

MR. COBBAN is some time getting under weigh with his story. But when the preliminaries are over, and the characters are being woven in and out of the plot, there is plenty of interest. As soon as we think we have plumbed one mystery, Mr. Cobban whips it out of sight and sets us hot foot on the track of another. Sir William Pierrepont, a wealthy banker of old family, is persecuted by a vulgar actress-wife, a legacy from his salad-days, and hides himself in London. He leaves sealed explanations with a young farmer, Lionel Coverley, who promptly losethem. Coverley, though he knows it not, is the son of the banker's unhappy marriage. The man who does know this is his cousin, Philip Pierrepont, who, with an eye on the inheritance for himself, tries to ruin Coverley. Everything is at sixes and sevens, while Sir William and the papers are missing. But they are found; the virtuous and honest are rewarded, and the intriguing Philip gets a Brummagem heiress. Further interest is afforded by Coverley's two love affairs—the first with a farmer's daughter; the second, which follows hard upon, with another cousin, Adela Pierrepont. Mr. Cobban tells his story freshly and vigorously.

The Adventures of John Johns. By Frederic Carrel. (Bliss, Sands & Co.)

JOHN JOHNS was the son of a Guernsey fisherman, who could barely afford to pay for his education at the local college. We are introduced to John on his arrival in London with a very few shillings in pocket after six years' unprofitable wanderings in Australia. He makes the most of a lucky introduction to a newspaper office. He is pushing and unscrupulous, but as brilliant as a journalist as he is resourceful as a liar. His leading idea is that "it was through women that men climbed fastest; their love was the lever which no barrier withstood," &c. The women of the story were one and all quite unable to withstand John's love, or, rather, what they imagined to be his love. Certainly he used the most impassioned language to each and all of them—language which would not disgrace a halfpenny novelette; and, no doubt, through them he climbed very fast indeed. From the most humble position in the *Planet's* office he rapidly becomes its editor, duly seducing his proprietor's wife, among other women, *en route*, precisely as did Bel Ami. His subsequent adventures include the subjugation of an elderly widow in society with £300,000 of fortune and, on her death, elopement