

✦ Authors and their Works. ✦

S. R. CROCKETT.

BARRIE, Crockett, and "Ian Maclaren"—these are the three fiction writers who may be said to represent Scotland now that Louis Stevenson has gone. Of the three, Crockett seems destined to have the largest literary output. "Ian Maclaren" is, so far, practically the man of one book. Mr. Barrie, considering the length of time he has been before the public, has been commendably careful not to produce too much, but Mr. Crockett has surfeited his readers within a couple of years, and it is his present boast that he has contracts with publishers which will keep him employed till the end of the century. One may overdo the thing. Good work needs a certain economy, and there is some danger to Mr. Crockett, especially as he has declared his belief in the man who "breaks out in a fresh place every time." In these days of high prices for fiction there is a special temptation for the successful story-teller. A century or two ago the English author's honorarium was often little better than the proverbial fiddler's pay; but the increase in the demand for fiction has quickened the competition immensely among editors and publishers for the services of the first five or six leading novelists, and forced up prices in proportion. Goldsmith got no more than £60 for "The Vicar of Wakefield," but nowadays it is quite possible for a novelist who has a "vogue," and who is neither a Goldsmith nor a Dickens, to command £1,000, or even £1,500, as the price for serial issue alone. Take the case of Mrs. Humphry Ward as typical of one or two others. For the American and English market alone she was paid for "David Grieve" the long figure of £16,000. She got from the British Colonies—Australia, India, etc.—no mean sum, I fancy, for they are big countries, and their people are great readers of popular literature. Say that she got £16,000 more for "Marcella," and £8,000 for "Robert Elsmere." That makes £40,000 for three books written during a period of six years. Not bad pay when one considers it is all profit! Mr. Crockett's figures have not yet begun to be much quoted, but we may take it that his serial rights alone will now run into four figures, and if he continues his absurd practice of rising when other people are thinking of going to bed, and keeping his secretary busy at the type-writer all day, he may soon be the wealthiest literary man in the country. Whether in a hundred years or so his work will compare with those of the poorly-paid classics it is perhaps "better only guessing," as the wicked are said to remark of their own possible future chastisement.

Mr. Crockett comes from the Galloway of his books, a place where the people are not too thick on the ground, and where everybody is free to keep his own angles and eccentricities. He was born in 1859, so that he is now in his 36th year. His father had a farm about nine miles from Castle Douglas, and within a mile of where the new Galloway railway station stands to-day. In this way the boy came to know all the country sights and sounds and the ways of birds and beasts. He lived in the open air and knew trees by climbing them, and boys by fighting them. And that life had a background: he read any book he could lay his hands on, and had his views as to which was Shakespeare's best play before he was far into his teens. Indeed, he was always reading Shakespeare. On one occasion he was discovered by Professor Clerk-Maxwell lying on the moors buried in the

study of "Hamlet." The two discussed the various characters together, and then parted. The conversation did two things for young Crockett—it gave him the Professor's friendship and left him richer by two half-crowns. Yet, although fond of Shakespeare, Milton, and Longfellow, Crockett had read all the boys' trash current in his day. "I see little harm in doing that," he has remarked. "It is not so much what a boy reads that hurts him; it is *not* reading. He will pick out what is good and enduring very soon. Boys *will* read books of adventure if they read at all. They take to it like the measles. There is a corrective internally that keeps a healthy boy straight when reading the greatest rubbish." Crockett used to learn off by heart a great deal of Shakespeare and Milton at this time, and he declares to-day (I should, however, like to test him) that if you were to quote a line from "Paradise Lost" he could go on for hundreds of lines without a break. As to books for the adult reader, he thinks every man should be a law unto himself. To talk about the best hundred books is so much nonsense. There is no "best hundred books," since what is best for you is not best for me. As well talk about the best hundred legal judgments, or the best hundred medical remedies! Of later day authors, Crockett believes in three men—Barrie, Kipling, and Stevenson. As for the older fiction writers, he agrees with Charlotte Brontë in thinking that Scott is first, and the rest pretty far down. He manages to get through all the Waverley Novels once a year. So he says, but surely one reading is sufficient in the case of some!

Young Crockett first went to school at the village of Lauriston, three and a half miles from his home. Then he went to Castle Douglas, where he was a pupil-teacher for a time. Getting a good bursary, he entered Edinburgh University when barely sixteen. There he took the full arts course, and then was tutor in several families. In the latter capacity he went abroad, roamed from Russia to Southern Italy, climbed the Alps, met all kinds of men, faced all sorts of tasks—in a certain Swiss inn quieted a baby which had defied all the resources of the place. There is a reminiscence of much of this in "St. Lucy of the Eyes," in the author's recent volume, "Bog, Myrtle, and Peat." Returning home, Mr. Crockett entered the Edinburgh Free Church College, and there studied spiritual anatomy, when he was not studying Hebrew. It was a good schooling, at least in breadth and variety, and when, in 1886, having received his "licence," he was set down as Free Church minister of the little Midlothian town of Penicuik, he was as fit for his work as most men are. This year, as is well known, he has resigned his ministerial charge in order to devote himself to literary work.

Long before the appointment to Penicuik young Crockett had begun his literary career. He began it as a journalist, but had precious little success in that way. He had been doing something on various Scotch papers, and when he was 18 he came up to London, "to see if there were openings here." He remained for six months, and just managed to pay his lodgings. At this time he wrote art criticisms, though he knew no more about art than Moses did, and could only tell an oil from a water-colour by smelling it! One day his editor sent him to call on a politician and ask his opinion

of a certain Bill. He met the man in the lobby of his house, and asked for "just one word." "Go away," he retorted; "I have nothing to say to you." Mr. Crockett went back to his chief and told him he had not been able to secure the interview. "Well, then, we don't want you here," said the editor. "Go to the desk and get your money, and let that end our connection." And that was the end of our author's journalism.

Mr. Crockett's first published work, curiously enough, was a volume of verse called "Dulce Cor." This was published in 1885, and under the name of "Fred Brereton." There is nothing great in the book, but neither is there anything to be ashamed of. Only 500 copies were printed, and some foolish people are now offering long prices for the volume, on the strength of the author's present popularity. Mr. Crockett, I believe, is prepared to give a certain sum to everybody who gets a copy and destroys it! It was not until 1893 that Mr. Crockett took possession of the reading public, and then he achieved the difficult feat by means of a book which half his readers cannot possibly have understood. "The Stickit Minister" is no doubt a capital work, if you have never required to be told what the title means. But I suspect as to that the English reader is pretty much in the position of the Frenchman who rendered the title "The Assassinated Clergyman." It does not matter. The book "boomed," and its success has kept Mr. Crockett busy ever since. Since then we have had that pretty love story, "The Lilac Sun Bonnet," that fine work, "The Raiders," the two little stories, "Mad Sir Ughtred of the Hills" and "The Play Actress," and the volume called "Bog, Myrtle, and Peat" already referred to. "The Men of the Moss Hags" is now running in *Good Words*, and a new story will begin in *Harper* next year.

It is probable that a good deal of the success of S. R. Crockett is due to the fact that his books and favourite characters do not offend against the accepted standards of morality as handed down from generation to generation of decent people. Moreover, they actually approve of these standards heartily, and bring to severe punishment those who go against them. Such an attitude in a fiction writer would not have attracted attention a few years ago, because it was taken for granted that he approved of such things before he went into the business. But George Moore and Grant Allen have changed all that. Mr. Crockett's books do not touch modern problems. He deals more in romance than in novel-writing as generally practised in these days, but he has long been studying the problems of the poor, and some time he will, no doubt, write a story on that theme.

In 1887 Mr. Crockett married a daughter of George Milner, author of "Country Pleasures" and "Studies on the Coast of Arran." Tall and broad-shouldered, with a genial, ruddy countenance and sparkling eyes, he is a man of the country, not of the town. He likes a quiet life, with the bairns playing about the door and the heather close at hand. There are six miles of woodland near his Penicuik home, and some of his best work has been composed in solitary walks among the Pentlands. Mr. Crockett has tried dictating his novels, but has failed. In dictating you choose the first word that comes, whether it is the right word or not, and that, of course, is fatal to style. He uses a phonograph for letters, and finds this very satisfactory. His work, as already indicated, is all done in the early morning. He gets up at half-past four, and by the time breakfast is ready the creative work of the day is over! The rest of the morning is taken up with proof-reading and lighter

work of that sort, and by twelve o'clock the day is his own. Mr. Crockett, unfortunately, is not free from some of the afflictions of the suddenly successful man. He likes to speak of his "heavy correspondence," and talks in a high way about giving three or four interviews per annum. Autograph-hunters, he declares, are becoming a nuisance to him. One American admirer, he says, sent him again and again a request for a page of his manuscript, and enclosed a twopenny-halfpenny stamp. "With these stamps I conducted my foreign correspondence for some time, but the man's patience gave out at last." This is simply churlish, and if Mr. Crockett were not a cleric he would never gloat over the incident. The autograph-hunter was an idiot to spend even one stamp in pursuit of such an object. But much greater writers than ever Mr. Crockett will be have treated such faddists with kindly consideration. Only they were not "Reverends"!

Literary Notes.

THE statement recently made public by Mark Twain furnishes a curious commentary on some speeches delivered lately for the purpose of showing how easily and profitably authors might become their own publishers. Some years ago Mr. Clemens, like an earlier and greater writer, invested his capital in a publishing firm which came to grief, with the result that he now finds himself heavily burdened with debts that, as he says, he never contracted, though they were accumulated on the faith of his name. He does not, in this trying emergency, fold his hands and cry "Kismet!" Like the great Sir Walter, he has made up his mind to pay to the uttermost farthing if he can, and in order to accomplish this heroic resolve he is starting a lecturing tour round the world.

"From my reception thus far on my lecturing tour," he says, "I am confident that, if I live, I can pay off the last debt within four years, after which, at the age of sixty-four, I can make a fresh and unencumbered start in life." This is a noble and a pathetic statement, a statement that does honour to the literary workers of the age. Mr. Clemens might take advantage of the law, and compound with his creditors, but he prefers to accept the total liability, and strain heart and brain to wipe it out. The situation has a deep pathos. Mr. Clemens has probably earned more money by his pen than any other living author, yet at sixty he finds himself a good deal worse than penniless. What he says about his position and his resolution will touch the hearts of people in both hemispheres, and all who admire courage and believe in conscience will wish him complete success in his gallant enterprise.

A better Chaucer for the general reader was probably never published than the edition of the "Canterbury Tales" just issued in Mr. Stead's "Masterpiece Library." But Mr. Stead makes rather a curious statement in the preface. "This edition," he remarks, "is not for students of Chaucer. It will only make them wild, and dispose them to homicide. But they are a few and feeble folk at the best. What I hope this booklet may do is to multiply their number by the hundred and the thousand." Does Mr. Stead seriously desire to see the number of feeble folk increased?

Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin & Co., of Boston, are to publish during the autumn a new volume of poems by the late James Russell Lowell. The

same firm is preparing for Transatlantic readers "The Cambridge Browning," in one volume, which is to contain "every line that Browning wrote." How long shall we in England have to wait for a single-volume Browning?

A Unique Concert.

TO celebrate the inauguration of the Telephone Trunk Lines of the Post Office a novel concert was held recently at St. Martin's-le-Grand, whereby large audiences in the chief cities and towns of the United Kingdom enjoyed a somewhat lengthy programme of music, transmitted from London by telephone.

But a short time ago it seemed almost beyond credibility that opera being performed in Paris could with clearness be heard in London by means of the telephone; yet such a test of the system must now be regarded as insignificant as compared with the remarkable results obtained in connection with the Post Office experiments.

The Trunk lines now erected afford communication from London to the Midland Counties, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, and, in response to official invitations, distinguished guests were present at Cardiff, Bristol, Birmingham, Hull, Leicester, Derby, Liverpool, Leeds, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Belfast, Dublin, and several other important centres, to listen to an excellent programme of vocal and instrumental music rendered in London.

A full orchestra, conducted by Mr. Arthur Crudge, in whose hands the whole of the musical arrangements were placed, performed standard overtures, operatic and various selections, which were transmitted simultaneously to the above-mentioned cities.

Anxiety on the part of the officials of the engineer-in-chief's department was considerably relieved when, at the termination of the first item on the programme, the audiences at the distant Scotch, Irish, and Welsh stations enthusiastically declared that the reception was perfect, that everything was well balanced, and as distinct as though the concert were being given in adjoining buildings.

It was said the tapping of the conductor's bâton, the opening chords, and the different instruments were at once easily recognised.

In addition to the orchestral selections the programme, which extended over three hours, embraced singing, recitations, pianoforte, cornet, clarinet, mandoline, and concertina solos, as well as a tune from the bagpipes.

The programme once commenced continued without interruption, each item being announced to the vast audience scattered over the country, the artists in London being encouraged by the applause and hand-clapping which, distant as it was, was heard with great distinctness.

When it is borne in mind that the notes had to be diverted at many stages, that the concert was really transmitted the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, the chief electrician's department of Her Majesty's Post Office can indeed claim a veritable triumph, and the several thousands attending and enjoying the entertainment a rare experience.

We learn that some of the music was at Cardiff secured in a phonograph and re-transmitted along fresh telephone routes to various towns.

Naturally the exceptional success attending this unique concert has given rise to some extravagant suggestions as to the music of the future.

One critic expresses an opinion that, encouraged by the achievements of the past, it would not be surprising should a Grand Central Music Supply Association come within the range of possibility, and that the householder will, at no distant date, be able to turn on his opera or chamber concert as he would turn on his gas, and enjoy it while seated snugly by his fireside.

This certainly would do away with cloak-room worries, and the inconvenience experienced at West End concerts arising from the "fashionable hat" now favoured by the ladies, but, in our opinion, the musical *entrepreneur* need have little fear as to his future prospects, notwithstanding that similar anticipations of a Central Musical Association are to be found in Bellamy's *Looking Backward*.

Probably there are some readers who would be interested to learn a few particulars of the wonderful telephonic system that has been promoted by the Government, and which has established a record so far as the transmission of music is concerned.

The telephone policy of Her Majesty's late Government was embodied in a Treasury Minute dated 27th May, 1892.

That policy contemplated, amongst other things, that the operations of the licensed Telephone Companies should be confined to towns or areas, and that the Trunk service of the country should be performed by the Post Office.

For the acquisition of the existing Trunk lines of companies, and the provision of a "backbone" system connecting England, Scotland, and Ireland together, Parliament provided, by the Telegraph Act of 1892, £1,000,000. Ultimately there will be a complete system of communication between all the important towns in the kingdom.

The mileage of wire is as follows:—

2,719 miles of 800 lbs. copper per mile per wire,	
4,914 do. 600 do.	do.
3,025 do. 400 do.	do.
99 do. submarine cable 24 miles long.	

Total 10,754 miles = 2,899 tons.

There have now been completed 7,595 miles. For the "backbone" line from London through Leeds to Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Dublin, the heaviest copper wire ever erected has been used. It weighs 800 lbs. per mile. Efforts have been made to reduce the underground portion as much as possible, as underground wires seriously impair the efficiency and clearness of telephone-speaking.

The transmitters used are the Deckert (an Austrian improvement on the Hunnings Granular Microphone), and the receivers are simple double-pole Bell instruments.

The wires have been erected on the revolving principle, and have been designed on the so-called KR. law, which has been developed by the Post Office. The result is held to prove the accuracy of this law.

All the circuits are metallic (twin wire).

The Trunk lines now erected afford communication for the first time from London to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, and Belfast.

The wires to Ireland extend through Leeds and Carlisle to Portpatrick, thence by cable across St. Patrick's Channel to Donaghadee, and thence to Belfast and Dublin, the length of the London-Dublin circuit being 578 miles.

The scale of charges laid down by the Treasury for three minutes' use of the telephone is 3d. per twenty miles: therefore the canny Scot who at Liverpool wished to hear his national music, the skirl of the pipes, from "Edinboro' toon," would discover that the privilege would be somewhat dearly bought, and that "bang would go five saxpences!"