

NEW BOOKS.

'THE STICKIT MINISTER AND SOME COMMON MEN.*

Mr. Crockett comes after Mr. Barrie; but did not Galt come after Scott? And though these two writers dealt largely with similar material, no one could call the author of 'The Provost' a mere imitator of the author of 'The Antiquary.' Galt's is, no doubt, by far the lesser literary personality; yet a distinct personality it remains. Let us, therefore, guard against the error of disposing of Mr. Crockett's claims as of those of an imitator of the 'Window in Thrums.' Roughly speaking, the form and the subject-matter in the two volumes is the same; but it would be easy even now to indicate points of divergence in the treatment, whilst the probability is that in future books Mr. Crockett's literary individuality will stand yet more distinctly revealed. We insist on this point, for we are of those who value very highly any literary work which is of an exclusively "derivative" character. And we speak with confidence of future books by the same author because the Scottish Ministry and the ancient province of Galloway are alike rich in racy types as yet unexploited, and because the success of his first essay—which has already reached a second edition—will undoubtedly stimulate Mr. Crockett to further efforts.

The 'Stickit Minister' contains some five-and twenty tales and sketches, the subjects of which are drawn from ministerial, and in a few cases from humble, life. All are vigorously written; indeed, where fault is to be found it is rather on the ground that restraint than that force is wanting. For instance, that blow from a poker which falls on a boy's head in "Duncan Duncanson"; that incident with the powder-flask in "The Split in the Marrow Kirk"—do they not savour somewhat too strongly of Mr. Kipling's manner to be perfectly in place among quiet tales of a Scottish parish? At times, too, the author's pathos seems to us overcharged. The story of "The Heather Lintie" is an instance. Here the climax—in which a girl is made to die opportunely just in time to preserve from destruction the fool's paradise in which she has lived—approaches the false sublime. Again, one or two of the author's characters incline to carry the martyr's temper somewhat too far for perfect sympathy. They *will* be martyrs; none shall say them nay. Perhaps this is a trait which has been transmitted to them from Covenanting forbears. For example, self-sacrifice in a good cause is noble; but what good purpose does the Stickit Minister serve in allowing misrepresentation to go unchecked? A simple denial would have saved the saintly and lovable Hugh Hamilton from becoming an outcast from among men, "accepted of the beasts"; for certainly his word was as good as that of a light woman. But that denial remains unspoken. And all this that we may have something to weep over. It is a mistake—but a mistake, we are convinced, arising simply from insufficient confidence on the part of the author, and from that restlessness as to the effect produced which this is apt to beget. In his next book let Mr. Crockett tell his plain tale with no thought in his head but to get it told. Then he will find that the pathos, of which we cannot doubt that he has ample command, will come of itself. And now we have dwelt on every fault which a diligent search has seemed to bring to light. For the humorous pieces in the volume we have nought but praise, and rarely good they are. In these the author seems surer of himself; he takes less trouble, and the laughter comes, wholesome, hearty, and spontaneous. "The Probationer" is the very plainest of tales—in truth it is no tale at all—but it is excellent. "John Smith of Arkland prepares his Sermon" rises to a height of sweet and noble humour. "The Lammas Preaching," "A Day in the Life of the Reverend James Pitby," "The Glen Kells Short Leet," every tale in which Saunders M'Quhoir makes his appearance—all these are gems of kindly fun. As regards the said Saunders, we hereby memorialise his creator that we desire to see and to know more of him. He is worthy to stand beside the character which to our thinking is the best in the whole of 'The Little Minister'—that of the

farmer, Wester Lunny. The Scots in this book is excellent. It seems to have been written naturally, without effort, as by one to the manner born, but one who has an ear for the fall of sentence, and an instinct for word and phrase. No doubt that many of the sentiments and expressions have been gathered up as they dropped from the lips of the people. This, for instance, relating to the family of the Sage of Chelsea, seems to bear upon it the stamp of authenticity. Says Saunders, "I used to think Jeems Carlyle the only yin o' the Carlyles that had come to ony guid (an' deed there were few better sheep in Dumfries market on Wednesdays than Jeems Carlyle's); but oor minister, wi' the help o' the Almichty an' some buiks o' Tammas Carlyle, thrawn stick as he was, hae garred anither thrawn stick o' a farmer body lift his een abune the nowt an' the shairn." Against the transference of an incident in the life of Willie Nicholson, the strolling poet, genius, and ne'er-do-weel, to the life of Hugh Davidson we must, however, enter a protest. Though due acknowledgment is made by the author, the incident suffers in the transference. Besides, Mr. Crockett has fertility enough to depend upon his own unaided resources. And to the next results of that fertility we look forward with a warm interest which is by no means wholly free from impatience.

GEORGE DOUGLAS.

THE WRITINGS OF WILLIAM BLAKE.*

The attitude of Blake's editors towards his text and his thought has long been a cause of blaspheming to the few earnest students of his work. These editors appear to hold him to have had so much either of the spoilt child or of the crazy enthusiast in him, that it was their veritable duty to improve his text and warn the unwary not to take his deepest convictions seriously. At first the "improvement" and warning alike were intelligible, and perhaps excusable, for the first editors, Messrs. Dante Gabriel and William Rossetti, had to introduce him for the first time to a public which hates the unusual and the obscure with a bitter personal hatred based largely upon the notion that he who is either unusual or obscure claims to be more distinguished in some way than it is itself, perhaps even to have senses and faculties which it does not possess. The public loves writers that are magnified reflections of itself, but abhors all who claim to belong to some special community, some special cult, some special tribe which is not of its kin. What wonder, then, that Blake's first editors said in substance to their readers, "Do tolerate this strange friend of ours; he is really very nice, though he does talk nonsense at times about inspiration and about seeing visions, and that kind of thing. If you will be civil to him we will smooth his hair, and put him into a coat as like your own as possible, and hide quite out of sight his own outlandish one." It is, however, wonderful and again wonderful, and no less inexcusable than wonderful, that any later editor should accept this dressed and brushed Blake for the real man, and do this without any word about the men who did the brushing and the tailoring, or without even mention that such a thing had been done. Yet Mr. Dante Rossetti was frank enough. In printing from Blake's MS. he found it necessary, he said, "to omit, transpose, or combine" in order to lessen "obscurity" or to "avoid redundancy." He also made many corrections of metre and grammar in poems which had been printed before, and avowed doing so, and against this little can be said, for the originals were in print and posterity could judge. Nor would even his doctoring of the poems from MS. have been a very serious falsification had he but taken care to preserve the originals from the vicissitudes of an already fading manuscript. He was wise in his generation, and to his wisdom perhaps Blake owes something of his popularity.

But what excuse can be offered for a publisher, for I do Mr. Housman the credit of supposing that publishers' reasons prevailed over the dictates of scholarship, who, months after the correct text has been printed in 'The

* 'The Stickit Minister and Some Common Men.' By S. R. Crockett, (Unwin.)

* 'The Writings of William Blake.' Parchment Library. (Kegan Paul, Trench and Co.)