

DOCTOR CLAUDIUS.*

THE author of *Mr. Isaacs* has passed the most critical ordeal in the career of a young novelist. He has written a successful second novel. We never take up the second novel of an author whose first work has been a success without trembling for him. His first book was a birth of his brain; there is danger that his second book is an attempt to keep step with his reputation, and that he will prove unequal to the task. Especially is this true in such a case as Mr. Crawford's. The ink is hardly dry on the pen with which we wrote our praise of *Mr. Isaacs*; yet here is *Doctor Claudius*, a full-built novel in an entirely new vein, yet, like *Mr. Isaacs*, strong, and fresh, and fine; thoroughly well-written and thoroughly interesting. Like the two crack oarsmen at the regatta, Mr. Crawford and Mr. Hardy have drawn easily ahead of the other novelists of the present year, and the race for the year's celebrity seems narrowed down to these two. With a single stroke Mr. Hardy put himself alongside Mr. Crawford; with his second book Mr. Crawford shoots a boat's length to the fore; will Mr. Hardy now put on a "spurt" and catch up again with his rival, or content himself with a second place on the course? We shall see.

"Scratch a Russian," it has been said, "and you will find a Tartar." Scratch the novel of today, it might be added, and you will find a Russian. A Russian countess played a prominent part in Mr. Hardy's

**Doctor Claudius. A True Story.* By F. Marion Crawford. Macmillan & Co. \$1.00.

But Yet a Woman, a Russian countess is the heroine of Mr. Crawford's *Doctor Claudius*. The Countess Margaret, such is the latter's name, is the American widow of a Russian officer who fell at Plevna; a widow with a virgin heart, who, while rambling about the old castle at Heidelberg, drops her parasol over the ledge to the very bottom of the ruin. Doctor Claudius is lying on the ledge, and gallantly climbs down to recover the lost parasol for its fair owner. Doctor Claudius is a Scandinavian giant, a professor in the University, with a virgin heart likewise. When, a little later, through the amiable offices of Mr. Silas Barker, a full-blooded young New Yorker, Doctor Claudius is formally introduced to the Countess Margaret, does it need much penetration to surmise the conclusion?

But the Countess Margaret will not at first listen to her majestic, fair-haired lover. In fact, on the moonlit deck of the steam-yacht, the "Streak," at the invitation of whose owner, a lordly Englishman, a pleasant party has been made up for a pleasure-trip across the Atlantic to America, the Countess refuses the Doctor, and makes him promise that he will never ask her the like question again. But an accident to the machinery of the yacht serves for an occasion of disclosing to the Doctor the true interior of the Countess's heart, and he sees he has but to bide his time.

Once in New York, of which the Duke and his party take easy possession, with a side visit to Newport, matters progress rapidly, but not without an unexpected interruption on the part of Barker, who, from having been spy in the camp, turns traitor, and concocts a plot for the Doctor's personal and financial ruin, in order thereby himself to lay siege to the Countess's heart. This turn in affairs sends Claudius back across the water, ostensibly to procure needed evidence of his identity, but for the deeper purpose of doing an important and critical secret service to the Countess at St. Petersburg. Barker improves his opportunity to the best of his cunning ability, but gets a flat dismissal, and Doctor Claudius returns in good time to his own. "And so they were married."

It is a very simple story, with just enough of mystery about the Doctor's true place and history to pique the reader's curiosity without irritating it; told with charming ease and vivacity, with clear insight to human nature, with graphic portrayments of character, with much intellectual power, and with a directness, force, and naturalness that never falter. The style sparkles, the book has many bright and brilliant things, the dialogue is sharp and witty, and the persons stand out with great distinctness and individuality. There is positively not an unpleasant thing about the story; it is as clean and fresh as a flower-garden; and,

while having no very positive aim, it is refined and entertaining. The two leading characters, Doctor and Countess, are finely drawn and impressive; the Duke and Barker are capital sketches of familiar types; and Lady Victoria, the Duke's sister, Miss Skeat, the Countess's companion, and Mr. Bellingham, the New York friend, add not only variety but interest to the group. Miss Skeat was "thin and yellow, and her bones were on the outside." On the yacht her blue serge suit "sat tightly over her like the canvas cover sewn round a bicycle when it is sent by rail." The Barkers, of New York, had an honorable name. They were "not Dutch, it is true, but they had the next highest title to consideration in that their progenitor had dwelt in Salem, Massachusetts." Mr. Barker was bright, though a rascal.

"Do you never walk?" asked Claudius, putting a handful of cigarettes into his pocket. "No," said the American, "I never walk. If man were intended by an all-wise Providence to do much walking he would have four legs."

And again:

"The social and municipal economy of New York," explained Mr. Barker, "consists in one third of the population everlastingly protesting against the outrageous things done by the other two thirds. One third fights another third, and the neutral third takes the fees of both parties. All that remains is handed over to the deserving poor."

The theme of *Doctor Claudius* is not so original and striking as that of *Mr. Isaacs*; but it is a more natural story; it has freshness, wit, "snap," and decided interest; it has power, art, delicacy, and the indefinable but unmistakable flavor of genuineness.