

*The Quick or the Dead*, by Amélie Rives. (Lippincott.)—Miss Amélie Rives, the gifted representative of an historic name, has more need of a guardian than a publisher. This fact, not unkindly said, is made evident by this lady's latest contribution to light literature.

There is a popular belief afloat that every male citizen of our great republic is born to edit a newspaper, and that every female comes into the world fully equipped to write a novel. All a little girl has to do is to seize a pen and put a love-story on paper. That the genius of the civilized world has taken upon itself this form of expression, and has elaborated it to a

high art, requiring the closest study on the part of the most gifted, never enters the mind of the new beginner, nor is such much to blame. This country of ours is flooded with a nasty literature, that is not only crude, but as low in tone as it is atrocious in taste. We have not the heart to join the crowd of rough critics doing penance in abuse for the fulsome flattery they were lately indulging in over this same young woman. The little girl is not to blame. Innocent herself, she is quite unaware of what she has done; for, led astray by the current literature of the day, she tried to produce something foreign to her pure womanly nature that would prove sensational. We trust this blunder will serve as a lesson to one who has good stuff in store from the hand of nature, on which to draw for a brighter lustre to a name already illustrious.

EDGAR SALTUS should have his name changed to Edgar Assaulted. He has been fired on from all sides by the critics, especially by the press, whose singular morality has made us world-famous. This is easily understood. The immorality of fiction is confined to one offence—adultery. An author may deal with murder, theft, burglary, trusts, bribery, or any other sort of crime, and even approve of the same, and escape condemnation as a dealer in criminal matter. But let him touch on sexual irregularity, and he is gone. When Mary Anderson was venturing her earlier efforts at recognition as an actress, the writer of this advised her to try the French drama. The little innocent girl lifted her nose as if offended by a bad odor, and said, "Never! it is too immoral. I want Shakspeare: my ambition is to play Lady Macbeth." Now, touching the morality of a woman who instigated a horrible murder of a good old man who had sought refuge as a guest in her house, we said nothing. We accepted the maxim of the old Pennsylvania magistrate who said that he never heard but one side—for hearing both confused him. We permitted Mary to pass, for she was marching on in a crowd that includes all the critics attacking Mr. Saltus's last book.

The trouble with Mr. Saltus is in the treatment of his subject. Had he paused in every chapter to express his horror of the story he was putting to record, the several protests would have been taken as a saving clause by the reader, who, going on and enjoying the novel, would have felt himself or herself saved from any charge of favoring a lack of chastity. The fact is, that Mr. Saltus belongs to a class of young men, naturally good, who think it a mark of cleverness to appear bad. This practice came in with the noble Lord Byron, who posed before the world as a perfect fiend of wickedness. Like the little dude in *The Henrietta*, who set up to be "awful bad, ye know," but wasn't, Lord B. was at bottom an innocent, inoffensive sort of being.

This is the style, however, and Mr. Saltus drops into it in a way to set all the critics in a rage. The exasperating part of it is that Mr. Saltus is not cynical—he is simply flippant. He is not only innocent of any wish to

approve of adultery, but he is ignorant of what he writes about. A beautiful, cultured girl, who sacrifices herself to a passion for a married man, would have that passion so saturated by sentiment as to lift the crime into something akin to heroism, if not virtue; and such would be quite incapable of the cold, calculating *rôle* given her by the author. An old offender, fascinated by an elderly gentleman's pocket-book, might be guilty of such treachery; but youth, sensibility, and refinement make such crime impossible. When an angel fails, a meteor is made; and the girl who thinks in love the world well lost has no concealments. She throws herself over the battlements of heaven in the sight of God. Pure love in a woman means self-sacrifice. If the funeral pyres devoted to widows among the heathen, as we call them, were extended to maidens who sacrifice themselves to love, and made part of our institutions, the last-named would make the self-immolation common, while writs of injunction would fall in showers to protect the other sort. Affection, however pure and strong, is not love. Of course, all lapses from chastity do not originate in this. Want that approaches starvation fills the ranks of the wretched creatures, born to be protected and tenderly cared for. If our guardians, pious and otherwise—which last means the press—would turn from admonition to the bodily care of these unhappy victims, some progress might be made in the direction of purity. Words are cheap, and this care worthless. There is no bread, no clothing, no shelter in them. The saddest sight open to our civilization is that which greets the eye in great commercial centres when night falls upon the town: the armies of fallen women steal out like shadows to chill the blood of true Christians with horror. All that makes life dear to us, all that gives the home its sacredness, is in the form of these wretches, that fierce competition has crowded down and trampled into dirt through the hungry generations, so sweetly sung of by the poet Keats. We ignore the evil; and fashionable religion, based on the Saviour, whose sad hours on earth were passed among such, draws the cloak of respectability about its selfish shoulders, and thanks God for its exclusiveness. If, however, a poor author stumbles over the line, the cry of virtuous indignation is loud and shrill.

We are living in an odd age. Probably the world never saw such a deluge of lascivious works, and such a number of critical pen-drivers who advertise what they condemn. These sorely-disturbed guardians of public morals forget, if they ever knew, that in ages before printing was invented or critics created the world was full of men and women, and the chastity of the one and the virtue of the other held their own, because of the fact that they were created in that way. We have a population of sixty-five millions; of these, probably a million read such works as those of Ouida, Braddon, and Saltus; while half that number, to make a very liberal estimate, see at odd intervals the strictures of the critics. To say that our homes are imperilled and the very foundations of social life are giving way from this handful, is simply absurd.

The indignant reviewers are as unhappy in their praise as they are in their abuse of Mr. Saltus. When they speak of his sparkling epigrammatic style, they show as little knowledge of that as they do of private character. Mr. Saltus is sparkling enough, but it is not the sparkle of the epigram. This last means condensing a volume of meaning into a sentence. Mr. Saltus has the form of condensation without the meaning. It is very like making a dance tune out of "Kathleen Mavourneen"—the jig is gained, but the music is lost.

Mr. Saltus is a young man—very young—with an unusual quantity of good stuff in him; but it did not come out in the story of "*The Truth about Tristrem Varick*" (Belford, Clarke & Co.). When the time comes for him to feel ashamed of the shadowy impossibilities and crude comments of this book, he will be in a fit state to produce something exceedingly clever.