Fiction in Foreign Parts.*

A Russian novelist heretofore little familiar to English readers is introduced to the public by Mr. Jeremiah Curtin's admirable translation of "Prince Serebryani." Count Alexis Tolstoï, the author, was born in 1817 and died in 1875. His life was mainly spent in the occupancy of various military, diplomatic, and court positions. He wrote both prose and poetry, and is best known by the historical novel here translated, and by a dramatic trilogy entitled "Boris Godunoff." This trilogy has also been translated by Mr. Curtin, who promises to publish it if the present volume be favorably received. We sincerely trust that its publication may not be long delayed, for the work has great intrinsic value, and Mr. Curtin's workmanship as a translator is far above the ordinary level. It will be remembered that to him we are indebted for our English version of the magnificent historical novels of Sienkiewicz. "Prince Serebryani" is a tale of Ivan the Terrible and his times. This monarch, and the nobleman of the title, are the chief figures in the work, and the generous manly character of the one is finely contrasted with the gloomy fanaticism and bloodthirsty tyranny of the other. Yet Ivan is not solely depicted as the monster of popular tradition, and human traits may be discerned by a careful study of his sanguinary career. The book offers a faithfully minute picture of old Muscovy in one of the most stirring periods of its history. It shows us the popular customs and beliefs, and the semi-civilized ways, of a race in the birth throes of national consciousness. It deals with horrors because the age dealt with them, and its characters are no carpet-knights of sentimental romance. The language is racy and idiomatic, sometimes too literally reproduced to be wholly intelligible, but always vigorous and productive of dramatic effect. Mr. Curtin's historical introduction is a little confused, but helps us to understand many things that the story alone would not make sufficiently clear to an English reader.

The "Noodlot" of Heer Louis Marie Anne Couperus, translated "Footsteps of Fate" by Mrs. Bell, is a very different sort of work from the author's "Eline Vere," which we reviewed some months ago. The latter is a bright chronicle of modern life in the Dutch capital, realistic in method and abounding in vivid if trivial sketches of society. An element of morbidity is indeed furnished by the heroine, and the story grows more and more tragic towards the end. In "Footsteps of Fate," the feeling is morbid throughout, and all three of the chief characters are of neurotic type. So the hero first murders his friend, and then both heroine and hero take poison and die in one another's arms. It cannot be denied that the author sounds with considerable art the depths of a mind diseased, but his story is as essentially untrue to the facts of life as it is unwholesome in its treatment.

The writer who calls himself "Maarten Maartens" has disappointed us in his latest novel, "God's Fool." The book has all the admirable qualities of its predecessors in the matters of style, minute description, and epigrammatic humor. In these respects, indeed, the author's talent verges closely upon genius, and there is no page of his volume that does not repay careful perusal. But the performance as a whole is unsatisfactory because it deals with an "impossible" subject. The "reine Thor" needs to be surrounded by an atmosphere of mysticism to be impressive; he is in his place in such a work as "Parsifal," or in an Oriental tale, or in a mediæval chronicle, but he does not fit in with the commercial surroundings of a modern Dutch town, and does not

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* Prince Serebryani: An Historical Novel of the Times of Ivan the Terrible and of the Conquest of Siberia. By Count Alexis Tolstoï. Translated from the Russian by Jeremiah Curtin. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co.

Footsteps of Fate. By Louis Couperus. Translated by Clara Bell. New York: D. Appleton & Co.

God's Fool: A Koopstad Story. By Maarten Maartens. New York: D. Appleton & Co.

The Return of the O'Mahony. By Harold Frederic. New York: Robert Bonner's Sons.

The Great Shadow. By A. Conan Doyle. New York: Harper & Brothers.

The Tower of Taddeo. By Ouida. New York: Hovendon Co.

Under Pressure. By the Marchesa Theodoli. New York: Macmillan & Co.

The Chatelaine of La Trinité. By Henry B. Fuller. New York: The Century Co.

The Monk and the Hangman's Daughter. By Ambrose Bierce and Gustav Adolph Danziger. Chicago: F. J. Schulte & Co.

From Australia and Japan. By A. M. London: Walter Scott.

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lend himself to the methods of modern realism, even when the realism is as genuine and wholly admirable in its way as is that of the present author. Viewed in the cold clear light of fact he is simply an idiot, and, as such, commands pity to the exclusion of the nobler forms of sympathy. The hero of "God's Fool" receives, when a boy, a blow upon the head which deprives him of sight and hearing, and so deranges his mental faculties that he remains a child all his life. The author tries to make of this unfortunate accident a blessing by persuading us that in being thus shut out from the external world the child is free to develop a spiritual character of the greatest moral beauty. But psychology is against the author's plan, and all the tender care which he lavishes upon his monstrous creation does not reconcile us to its acceptance. Aside from the portrayal of this character, the book is such a study of men and manners as few living writers are capable of making. The story, too, is told with admirable constructive art up to the final tragic episode, but that, we confess, we have not been able to understand at all. If the author intends us to believe that Hendrik was killed by his brother Hubert, he is guilty of an unpardonable piece of mystification. And if he intends anything else, we are unable to state what it is. In a group of four little apologues, prefixed to the volume as texts, we are obscurely given to understand something of the author's philosophy. The apologue of the naturalist seems to be that we must take man as he is; of the logician, that too much zeal for shaping things as we would have them may result in failure as well as injury to ourselves; of the poet, that it is our own fault if, in pursuit of an ideal, we are blind to the possibilities of actual existence. The fable of the satirist is so characteristic of the author that we leave it to speak for itself: "There was a man once — a satirist. In the natural course of time his friends slew him, and he died. And the people came and stood about his corpse. 'He treated the whole round world as his football,' they said, indignantly, 'and he kicked it.' The dead man opened one eye. 'But always toward the goal,' he said."

Mr. Harold Frederic has been favorably known for several years as the author of novels dealing with American life, and remarkable for their careful workmanship and faithful study of certain types of character. But Mr. Frederic's previous performance has not prepared us for "The Return of the O'Mahony," a novel so different from the others both in subject and treatment that we find it difficult to admit its production by the same hand. It has a complicated and original plot, and is rapid in action, while Mr. Frederic's other stories are inclined to be both simple and conventional in treatment; its exciting succession of episodes is also in striking contrast to the sedate and somewhat philosophical movement of its predecessors. The contrast in theme is also marked, for it is mainly a story of Irish life and character, depicted with an insight with which we find it difficult to credit an American writer. We almost seem to be reading a novel by Charles Lever, although a novel without the element of rollicking humor that is never wholly absent from the Irishman's pages. The O'Mahony, it should be stated, is a bogus one; an American soldier who learns of an Irish estate of which the ownership is about to lapse, and who boldly takes possession under the family name. This Arthur Orton of fiction is more successful than the famous Claimant, for his imposture is not discovered, and he enjoys his stolen possessions to the end. The story is one of surprisingly varied interest, and never allows the attention to stray. It is not often that so welcome a novel is found among the host of paper-covered fictions that issue weekly from the press. We can recommend it with a good conscience.

Dr. Doyle's story of "The Great Shadow" is hardly more than a novelette in size, but it deals with one of the greatest of historical events, with the final overthrow of Napoleon and the end of the great European war. The author even takes us to Waterloo, which is a rash venture for any novelist after Hugo and Stendhal. The "great shadow" of the title is, of course, the shadow that Napoleon cast over Europe. The chief character of the story is the French refugee—one of Napoleon's officers—who finds shelter on a Scotch farm during the Elba period, and who takes with him, on departure, the heroine of the tale. The story is spirited and interesting, and often suggests the manner of Mr. Blackmore's "Springhaven."

As every confirmed novel-reader knows, there are two distinct Ouidas. One of them is a writer of highly-seasoned tales of English and continental society, tales for which no extravagance is too unbounded, no sensational feature too morbid or meretricious. The other Ouida is the writer of prose idyls so exquisite in sentiment, so tender in feeling, and so graceful in

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style, that they almost deserve the name of classics. The first of these writers was responsible for "Strathmore" and "Chandos"; the second has given us "Signia" and "A Leaf in the Storm." Sometimes, as in "Wanda" and "Under Two Flags," the composition shows marks of both hands, but as a rule they are kept fairly distinct. "The Tower of Taddeo," Ouida's latest novel, is a book that illustrates the higher and more poetic aspect of the author's singular literary gift. It is a graceful story of the Florence that she loves so well, and has many an incidental note of scorn for the modern inheritors of that fair city's fame, who scruple not to defile and to destroy the beauty bequeathed by the centuries, but held by no means now as a sacred trust. There are many suggestions of "Romola" in this story, for its interest centres about a great scholar and antiquarian, living, like the creation of George Eliot's genius, with a beautiful and devoted daughter. The story is almost too pathetic at times, for it pictures the triumph of mean selfishness over generosity and devotion to ideal ends. One need not be a professed bibliophile to shed a tear over the fate of the Dante codex, or be held unduly sentimental because sharing the grief of the scholar's daughter at the demolition of the beloved tower in which her tranquil life had been spent.

"Under Pressure" is a story of modern Rome, and is very fittingly dedicated to Mr. Marion Crawford, who has done his best work in the portrayal of just such scenes and characters as the present writer has chosen for her canvas. Of a task similar to that so successfully performed in the "Saracinesca" series of novels, the Marchesa Theodoli has not unsuccessfully acquitted herself, although her work is stiff-jointed when compared with the easy flexibility of Mr. Crawford's, and somewhat lacking in color and richness. But the patrician type of character that she presents in the persons of Prince and Princess Astalli is essentially that of the Saracinesca, and is evidently described from something more than hearsay. The contrast between the old and the new generation is distinctly brought out, and the obvious lesson of the book is that tradition and custom, however held as sacred, must give way to the influences of a changed environment. The two daughters of the Astalli have been trained with all care in the good old ways of patrician Rome, yet they are essentially of the new age, and it needs but the slightest external impulse to arouse them to self-expression and self-assertion. The parents are possibly represented as a trifle too heartless to be strictly human, and they seem to consent more readily than consistency would require to an alliance with a liberal family, however wealthy and noble; but, admitting these slight defects, the plot is skilful in construction, and sufficiently provided with human interest. There are many indications that the writer is a literary beginner, and, for such, her work gives much promise.

One must not expect to find much of a story in "The Chatelaine of La Trinité." This book, like Mr. Fuller's previous production, depends almost entirely for interest upon its style, its allusiveness, and its suggestive way of touching, with the faintest possible tinge of satire, upon scenes and objects dear to the artist and the traveller. One who has never set foot in Lucerne, or Salzburg, or Verona, will find little charm in the chapters devoted to those charmed spots, for it is the writer's constant care to shun the explicit, and to provide only the faint side-lights of fancy as an illuminant. As for the presumably human figures that flit from scene to scene in his pages, they have only the suggestion of flesh and blood; they are little more than personified abstractions, and, without frequent reference to the titles that so aptly designate them, the reader would find it difficult to keep them distinct. Mr. Fuller's style is a carefully elaborated product, refined almost to preciosity, and a trifle monotonous, yet often admirable in its quiet grace. With the right kind of mental and moral preparation, one may extract considerable subdued satisfaction from this highly-finished piece of literature, but it appeals at best to an artificial taste, and to the very limited circle in which such taste is likely to have been developed. Mr. Fuller's manner is essentially his own, although Mr. Henry James probably had something to do with its fashioning.

The story of "The Monk and the Hangman's Daughter," which is told by the collaboration of Mr. Ambrose Bierce and Mr. Gustav Adolph Danziger, is stated to be based upon a manuscript legend found in the monastery of Berchtesgaden. It is a picturesque and romantic tale of the seventeenth century, with the theme of "Ekkehard," but a different outcome, for the monk of Berchtesgaden does not, like his prototype in Scheffel's immortal pages, resist the allurements of the flesh. The religious mysticism of the story appears a little

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forced, and the sensuous note, accented by the accompanying illustrations, makes the composition a trifle unwholesome. The best thing about it is the description of the Königssee and the surrounding mountains as seen with the eyes of the monk, to whom their wild magnificence appeals as symbolical of the wrath and power of the Creator.

The stories comprised in the collection styled "From Australia to Japan" have abundant action of a highly interesting sort. In point of style they leave much to be desired, being written — descriptions no less than conversations — in the sort of educated slang peculiar to globe-trotting Englishmen, a language which mingles the gutter vocabulary with uncouth foreign words of local significance, and, again, with familiar allusions to the classics. Mr. Rudyard Kipling gave vogue to this mode of speech, and the present writer appears to be one of his many imitators. His stories are given a certain distinctiveness by their tinge of socialism, which appears in the most unexpected places, and about which the writer seems to be in earnest. The book displays a lively imagination, and has no slight degree of humorous interest.

WILLIAM MORTON PAYNE.

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