

A NATURE NOVEL

There are two women in American fiction—tremendously successful writers, both—whose recipes for a best-seller are similar. Gene Stratton Porter and Frances Hodgson Burnett are apostles of the Impossibly Virtuous. Inevitably their books present at least one character apiece who inherits equally from the peerless knight of the medieval romance and the unsullied hero of the Sunday school story.

The comparison must not be pushed too far. Mrs. Burnett has humor and a gift of portraiture. Mrs. Porter shows an almost pathetic lack of humor, not only in the absurdities of situation and dialog she permits herself, but also in her failure to get results from a really humorous episode. And between lay figures and supernewsboys she succeeds in creating very few genuine people.

But if Mrs. Burnett can tell a story, Mrs. Porter can tell the names of all the birds you are likely to hear in a tamarack swamp. She has no unusual

gift of description, but by a combination of ecstasy and accurate nomenclature she does preach the gospel of the out-doors.

Michael O'Halloran is a young Irishman whose boyish independence and resourcefulness might have made him a really interesting character if he had not been drowned in the syrup of his own virtues. One permits him, at a tender age, to kidnap a crippled orphan and instal her as his protégé, but one rebels a little when he tells the city editor of the town's best newspaper how to run his business, reorganizes the household of a God-fearing farmer, thus indirectly leading the entire rural community upward and onward, apparently saves from disgrace the father of the beautiful young lady whose well-meant but injudicious charity he tactfully repudiates, and withal provides enough epigrams to head half the chapters in the book. The other characters—with the exception perhaps of Lily Peaches, the orphan, herself—are jerked about by the heart-strings to show how beautiful is love in a cabin and how loathsome is "society," and to point a few other well-assorted morals.

Michael O'Halloran, by Gene Stratton Porter.
New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. \$1.35.