

A volume of short stories from various distant lands, and gathered together under the appropriate title of *Beyond the Skyline*, makes any chance reader promptly register a vow to make a further acquaintance of the writings of their author, Mr. Robert Aitken. They range through various degrees of merit, as well as a great variety of stage setting—from the Cordilleras to the Firth of Lorne, and from Cape Town to the Upper Niger. The story called "The Brand of Cain" possesses a certain original strength, for it tells how a man saves the woman he loves from massacre by Indians by impressing his cattle-brand upon her white shoulders—because he has a pact with their tribe to spare all possessions bearing his brand. And again there is the story of "Meretrix," telling how a man loves and honours a woman, in spite of evil gossip, and would make her his wife, though all Cape Town believes her to be unworthy; but the day comes when she herself forces him to give her up, because for very shame's sake she finds herself obliged to tell him that she is all that gossip says, and worse—she has paid her father's debts by selling army secrets to England's enemies. But easily the best in a collection that averages well is "A Second-Class District." It is an intimate little drama, enacted somewhere in that portion of Africa which Joseph Conrad has christened the Heart of Darkness; and it might easily have been written by him and included in his characteristic and little known *Tales of Unrest*. There are only four actors in the story who really count: the new Commissioner, young, attractive and ruinously self-satisfied;

Hermann Brandt, the representative of an important German trading company, who unwisely entertains the Commissioner; Hilda Brandt, the mild, fair-haired wife of the trader, who allows herself to look upon the new Commissioner with—who shall say how much favour? and Boma, Brandt's native cook, who has an inborn distrust of women, and whom the new Commissioner makes the fatal mistake of kicking. Now just whose fault it all is, no one ever finds out—but the known facts are that Brandt lends Boma to the Commissioner as his body servant during his trip up the river to headquarters; that somehow there is an attack by hostile natives, and at the crucial moment those who should have protected the Commissioner's boat are not on hand; and later, the only part of the Commissioner that is ever recovered is his head, which Boma, the cook, thoughtfully returns to Hilda in the identical bag which she gave the Commissioner as a keepsake.