Novels and Tales

The position of Maarten Maartens as a novelist of the first rank is steadily becoming assured. His latest study of Dutch social life is called *My Lady Nobody*. It has, perhaps, not quite so strong an ethical purpose as his "God's Fool" and "The Greater Glory," the latter of which will be remembered by our readers as having first appeared in The Outlook. On the other hand, the story of "My Lady Nobody" is simpler; there are fewer subordinate characters, more direct action, and perhaps more positive story interest. As with all his best work, the writing is witty, clever, and in style crisp to a fault. Epigrammatic sentences superabound. Looking at the substance of Mr. Maartens's work, one constantly wonders at his immense knowledge of character and motives. The critics say a great deal about his intimate knowledge of Dutch social life; really his power lies in his acquaintance with universal human nature. Like Thackeray, he has been accused of cynicism, but it is true of him as well as of the great English novelist that his keenest thrusts are actuated by a hatred of the insincere and dishonorable which is really only another form of a love for the true and good. In the present novel Ursula and the brothers Otto and Gerard are finely and distinctly drawn: in all three the essential nobility of character is clouded by widely differing conditions, but in the end it is triumphant. The real tone of the book is optimistic, none the less so that it holds up shams and social selfishness to ridicule. It is a novel to keep the attention throughout, and to make one think after the volume is laid aside. (D. Appleton & Co., New York.)

The real lack of such a novel as Mr. George Gissing's *In the Year of Jubilee* is best seen by contrasting it with such work as that of Maarten Maartens. Mr. Gissing is wonderfully skilled as a realist, but there is not the slightest moral force to his story. He gives us a flat, direct, exact picture of middle-class life in London, sparing no touch of the vulgar, the common, or the depressing. We admit freely and once for all that just such people as he describes do exist, and that his skill in putting these people before us is great, and then we ask, "What of it?" The story neither entertains nor instructs. It gives us no ideals; it excites no hope of social improvement; it has no message either to humanity or to literature. The characters are mostly odious; their doings are not worthy of record. The reader is all the more exasperated because he cannot help see that Mr. Gissing's natural talent is great. We hope he may hereafter use it to better purpose. (D. Appleton & Co., New York.)

Mr Bliss Perry's *The Plated City* has no pretensions to being a great novel, but it is certainly a readable story. It touches on labor and race problems just enough to stimulate thought on these subjects without trying to offer serious solutions. The scene is laid in a typical New England manufacturing town. The eccentric, somewhat overbearing, but tender-hearted and generous manufacturer, Dr. Atwood, is an excellent character. In talk and action his personality is strongly rendered; indeed, Dr. Atwood is the one really "convincing" person in the book. The plot introduces a baseball game, described with much spirit and vigor; a great fire is also vividly described. If the story does not greatly instruct, it at least entertains satisfactorily. (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.)

Mr. Stockton's *Captain Horn* is a story of adventure pure and simple. It must fascinate boys and all who retain their boyish tastes in fiction. The skill shown in the direct and sober narrative of marvelous things reminds one of Defoe. Of Mr. Stockton's peculiar droll and dry humor there is comparatively little, though toward the end the author occasionally lightens his pages with fun. The same may be said of character-depiction; it is not altogether absent, but there is little of it. The interest keeps persistently about the finding and safe transport to civilization of an immense treasure—that fabled to have been hid by the Incas of Peru. Mr. Stockton seems to have said to himself, "Other treasure-stories end with the finding of the treasure; mine shall begin there." The plot is ingenious and well sustained to a really remarkable degree. Mr. Stockton's extraordinary powers of invention show no signs of flagging. (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.)

Mr. Robert S. Hichens, the author of "The Green Carnation," gives us in *An Imaginative Man* a morbid, unwholesome story. His "Man" is not "imaginative" at all, but merely conceited. His little love-affair with the Sphinx is the most preposterous rubbish. Where the book is not vicious, it is silly. (D. Appleton & Co., New York.)

The Moon, who is really an important character in all love episodes, has been often thoughtlessly ignored by the novelists. Not so, however, by Georg Ebers, in his mediæval tale, *In the Fire of the Forge: A Romance of Old Nuremberg*, two volumes translated by Mary J. Safford. (D. Appleton & Co., New York.) The poor old Moon has her ups and downs, her ecstasies and agonies, so intense is her sympathy with the brave knight Heinz and the fair saint Eva Ortlieb. The Emperor Rudolph of Habsburg, notwithstanding that he is an emperor and we are fallen upon democratic days, is described as eminently respectable, and even correct and amiable. In the end, after much tribulation, the Moon is comforted by seeing poetic justice done, and a merry carillon of wedding-bells rings out the tale. There is local color in the description, but not the all-pervasive, mediæval atmosphere that renders Hugo's "Notre Dame," Reade's "Cloister and Hearth," and George Eliot's "Romola" works of high art.

As a study of life in a New England factory village, *Dr. Gray's Quest*, by Francis H. Underwood, is a success. While the title is something of a misfit, and the story, after the manner of our end-of-the-century fiction, lacks a climax, the characters are well drawn and typical. The plot, if there can be said to be a plot, is well managed; the situations are harmless, and the dialogue is not particularly brilliant, but the story moves on steadily and develops logically. (Lee & Shepard, Boston.)

Of the German novelists of the Decadence, Hermann Sudermann belongs to the better class. He is chiefly known by his gloomy story "Frau Sorge" (Dame Care). Gloom as well as a morbid psychological analysis characterize all his tales. They lack the frank animalism of the French writers of the Decadence, but they are hardly less unhealthful. *The Wish* has been translated by a woman, Lily Henkle, with a commendatory introduction by another woman, and published by D. Appleton & Co. It must be admitted that from a literary point of view this story is artistic; but if Sudermann is ambitious, in company with Ibsen, Björnson, Zola, and Tolstoï, to transfer his sermon from the pulpit to the novel, we cannot believe that he will produce many converts to morality. His work has an intense realistic quality, but it lacks the idealism that inspires. As for this novel in particular, it is wofully depressing.