

## CLINTON SCOLLARD'S "THE CLOISTERING OF URSULA."\*

Some books remind us pleasantly, yet firmly, that we never entirely outgrow the artless enjoyments of childhood. This is one of that class. The reviewer admits (with all the more frankness because of what he intends to say next) that the sight of *The Cloistering of Ursula*, when he took it up to read, with its gay, vermilion binding, its felicitous romantic title, and the introductory rigmarole about being the hitherto unpublished memoirs of the Italian Marquis of So-and-So, caused a slight sinking of the heart. Indeed, however much one despises the narrowness of those persons who prefer one sort of subject matter in their novels to the exclusion of every other, it is no sin to assert that, while a great many spirited romances of the lady and the sword have been written (and enthusiastically received) not all of them have been actually enthralling, and that with each addition to their number the chance that the old story in its new form will prove potent in securing and holding the attention becomes smaller. All the more remarkable is it, then, to find one in which the interest is as lively as the theme demands.

Just as in the Golden Age you were not merely absorbed, but, perhaps, set a-tingling in every nerve by the humble narrative of Archie's escape from the den of the counterfeiters—an exit made with the staccato accompaniment of pistol shots, an episode punctuated with the possibilities of sudden death—so again you may find in the sanguinary but fortunate adventures of Andrea Uccelli a similar means of making the hours fly by like minutes while the book lasts; that is, if you are not an irretrievably mature person.

The story is very well written. The style is flowing throughout, and is without affectation other than the harmless use of a few old English phrases put in to impart a flavour of old Italian to the sup-

\*The Cloistering of Ursula. By Clinton Scollard. Boston: L. C. Page Co. \$1.50.

posed translation. The author tells his story without digressions concerning the conditions of the time or the scenery of the place, suggesting much of both, nevertheless, in a cleverly unobtrusive way. He takes a certain amount of pains with his characters, moreover, to let you know the kind of people they are, yet at the same time is very much alive to the fact that the complexities of ordinary human nature are not under examination upon this occasion: the plot is the thing—the prolongation of the distresses and perils of the hero to the limit; then the happy consummation. All in all it is a clever book.

It concerns itself with the rivalry between two powerful noble houses in the ancient city of Lorena. The feud speedily becomes bloody, and as the outcome of a wholesale slaughter of his family by the opposing faction, Andrea burdens himself with the task of revenge single-handed. Ursula, the heroine, is an object of inspiration and of tender care to him throughout. Her heart was at one time set upon entering a sisterhood, but it is no serious breach of confidence to declare that in the last chapter she consents to select Andrea's ancient garden seat as the scene of her cloistering.

The most strenuous aspect of the novel is revealed in the following passage:

Both men were bleeding from many wounds. Their arms were tightly pinioned and their legs partially secured. There was an aching hush of apprehension, then some one not visible screamed a word of command, whereat the two prisoners were seized by the powerful men guarding them, lifted in air, and hurled head foremost downward. An instant later their bodies lay, masses of crushed flesh and bone, on the uneven pavement of the piazza.

Then, to add to the grisly horror of the scene, men with long, glistening knives leaped out of the throng. Upon the breathless corpses they flung themselves, gashed their hearts out, and pinned them, reeking with blood, high upon one of the doors of the Palazzo Pubblico.

This is the vengeance of the Uccelli upon the Neri.

Carl Hovey.