

originality and individuality; there is such vigor and variety in its portraiture of human character, such graphic fidelity in its descriptions of scene and incident, such life-like delineation of strange uncouth types, and such blending of the rougher with the gentler aspects of human nature; the book has in a word so many and such diverse and stirring elements of dramatic interest, that we are ready to pronounce it one of the most remarkable products of American fiction of recent years. It is American fiction pure and simple. The author is an American, and the subject is intensely American.

The subject is life on the famous Eastern Shore of Maryland in the old slave days preceding the Civil War, say fifty years ago. Few regions on American soil lend themselves more effectively as a background for romance, and few departments of American life are capable of yielding greater interest under the touch of a knowing and skillful pen. It is not too much to say that Mr. George Alfred Townsend has illuminated this now fading picture with a vividness which no other American author, not even Mrs. Stowe, has surpassed. The historic truthfulness of his work may be questioned; the artistic power of it never. Long after the reader has closed the book, the desolate stretches of the Eastern Shore, its cross roads, its creeks and swamps, its rivers and inlets, its dissevered villages and lonely mansions will remain stamped upon the mind as a real scene; and the figures of Judge Custis and his lovely daughter, of Meshach Milburn the lover, with his "entailed hat," of Virgie and the other beautiful quadroons, or old Patty Cannon, that she-devil of the white race, and of Sampson Hat, that hero of the black, of Col. Van Dorn, a very prince of freebooters, and of Joe Johnson, and Jimmy Phœbus, and the rest of the company, good, bad, and indifferent, will move before the eye like persons actually known. In this effect of stamping his conceptions upon the reader Mr. Townsend has achieved an extraordinary success.

The interest of the story divides between the family fortunes of Judge Custis and the exploits of a gang of kidnapers who infest the Eastern Shore, and live by stealing slaves and running them off to market. The judge's daughter is married to Meshach Milburn early in the story, apparently as a sacrifice to her father's necessities, but in the end to prove a happy wife; and the doings of the kidnapers are related with a dramatic force which has no parallel in recent literature. It is in these scenes of avarice, lust, rapine, and bloodshed that the violence of the book resides; the life described is not without passages which make the cheek blush and the blood curdle; but an intensely dramatic theme is never surrendered to a melodramatic treatment, and, barring an occasional extravagant epithet or eccentric metaphor, the reader has no reason

MR. GEORGE ALFRED TOWNSEND'S NOVEL.*

THIS story has very marked traits, and the traits are in that degree questionable that we should suppose it must have required some courage to publish it, but we do not fully credit a current report in the newspapers that it was "steadfastly refused by the Boston publishers." Boston publishers know a good book when they see it, and some of them would have been the first to recognize the strong and striking merits of this work. The book is not one for every reader. We should not put it into the hands of the young folks of the family, or even leave it in their way. Its title is a literary mistake; a fanciful, petty, feeble title for a very matter-of-fact, large proportioned, strong fibered book. The author's English, in his descriptive passages, is occasionally very bad; involutions, and incompletenesses, and various violations of syntax and taste doing offence to the feelings of the well-trained readers. But we forgive and forget all these faults. The staple of the book is so fresh and substantial; it has such

*The Entailed Hat. By George Alfred Townsend.
Harper & Brothers. \$1.00.

to feel that it is the author who is subjecting him to a strain.

We cannot now go further into the particulars of this remarkable book, which has enough in it of picturesque locality, of strongly marked human nature, of earthly passion in all its grades, of deviltry and of sainthood, of suffering and of sweetness, of action and of sentiment, of life in every diversity of aspects, to stock half a dozen novelists of the day. There are blemishes enough to the book to set it far back from being "the great American novel;" but a truly great American story it certainly is, and it shows how rich American character and life really are in materials for the romancer who has the knowledge and skill for handling them.