

It is a curious fact, by the way, that the extraordinary jargon which these people speak varies not only in different towns, but in different streets of the same city, a skilled ear being able to note variations between the speech of Houston Street and that of Delancey, between that of Rivington Street and that of Broome. (See *The Lounger*, page 61.)

"Yekl"

A Tale of the New York Ghetto. By A. Cahan. D. Appleton & Co.

THE EXPLORER and the expounder are very much abroad nowadays. As amateur photographers hold exhibitions of their pictures with mutual delight, so the man who has observed a particular phase of life with photographic minuteness considers himself thereby entitled to expose the results of his observations, and to join the modern army of "local color" writers. Mr. Cahan knows all about what he calls the New York Ghetto (though the term rather comes into the slipshod class of imperfectly applied words which the diffusion of a certain sort of education has brought into common speech), and he is forward to tell us all about it, with a profusion of revolting details for which we hardly know whether to be grateful. Without wearing the white carnation of the anti-Semitic crusade, one may differentiate Jews so far as to admit that the manners and customs of Suffolk Street are (as a clergyman well known to a past generation of Philadelphians used to say of the sensations of the lost) "neither pleasing nor delightful."

The fundamental conception of the tale has a certain pathos. The wife left in far-off Russia, the husband coming to New York and gaining an insight into and liking for a new form of life, the two brought together and proving through the new element hopelessly incompatible, the overturning of the family life in favor of another woman—all these human elements of interest could not quite fail of their effect in whatever setting they were placed. But here they are nearly always as little effective as possible, because the attention is continually distracted from them to the mass of unpleasing details by which they are surrounded. This is all the more so by reason of Mr. Cahan's habit of italicizing words supposed to be spoken in English and intermingled with the Yiddish in which the characters are usually represented as conversing; by this means he causes to "jump at the eyes," as the French say, the kind of words with which we have been more than satiated in the comic papers. His very phonetic fidelity gives all manner of grotesque and repulsive shapes to familiar words, such as *darn stess* for downstairs, and *kshpenshesh* for expenses. "Vot you kickin' aboyt, anyhoy? Jaw don't mean notin' at ull. If you don' vonted never min', an' dot'sh ull. It don' cut a figger, shee?" Such is a comparatively mild specimen of the amenities through which we are led in the hideous scene of the dancing-academy.

However, it cannot be denied that Mr. Cahan has chosen a comparatively unworked field for his study, and that for those who have an interest in social and ethnological problems there is matter for thought in his vivid picture of "one of the most densely populated spots on the face of the earth—a seething human sea fed by streams, streamlets and rills of immigration flowing from all the Yiddish-speaking centers of Europe." "Hardly a block," he tells us, "but shelters Jews from every nook and corner of Russia, Poland, Galicia, Hungary, Roumania; Jews crowded out of the 'pale of Jewish settlement'; Russified Jews expelled from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kieff, or Saratoff; Jewish runaways from justice; Jewish refugees from crying political and economical injustice; people torn from a hard-gained foothold in life and from deep-rooted attachments by the caprice of intolerance or the wiles of demagoguery—innocent scapegoats of a guilty Government for its outraged populace to misspend its blind fury upon; students shut out of the Russian universities, and come to these shores in quest of learning; artisans, merchants, teachers, rabbis, artists, beggars—all come in search of fortune." If anyone wants to know what this "human hodgepodge" is like, Mr. Cahan's book will tell him in the most graphic manner.