The Sage-Brush Parson. By A. B. Ward. Cloth. Pp. 390. Price, $1.50. Boston: Little, Brown & Company.

THIS is one of the strongest and most human stories we have read in months, and though in treatment the tale is romantic and at times melodramatic, the atmosphere is markedly realistic, making the story, in spite of its romanticism, redolent of the soil and instinct with the life of the rugged and rough mining-world in the arid, parched and barren sage-brush country of Nevada, where nature hoards her treasure under a stern and austere mantle and where mighty mountains and canyons compass the desert plains.

Into this western mining-camp, rich in its types of mankind and strong in the boldest contrasts, into a community where men are at once reckless of human life, liberal in their patronizing of the saloons and lavish in their use of profanity, enters the brilliant but erratic Methodist clergyman,—a born poet, a genius, with all the eccentricities and contradictions of such a character; a man with a prophet's

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tongue of flame and a heart that is as human as his aspirations are divine; a man in whose finely-strung nature we see as though through a magnifying glass the ever-present conflict that is waged in all our lives—the battle between the higher and the lower. Here, too, we see in an impressive way the manner in which often in life things seem to conspire to carry one to a catastrophe—times when even the noblest acts and deeds become malignant in their influence upon the fate of the victim, bearing him relentlessly toward the dark chasm. Here also are pictured the lights and shades of life; the periods when all seems well, the days when all goes wrong.

The hero, Clement Vaughn, was born with a bad heredity, but was dedicated at his birth by his parents to the ministry. He is finely educated and in addition to his clerical education he has studied medicine, surgery and music and has delved somewhat into scientific subjects. He is considered handsome and highly magnetic. He is a master-musician and is by nature a poet and an idealist. It is not strange, therefore, that such a youth falls in love with an English girl and marries her in spite of the fact that there is little if anything in common between them save physical beauty and a certain magnetic attractiveness. The girl soon tires of him and he of her. She is worldly and a lover of the good things of life, as the superficial term them. Vaughn's high aspirations are little understood; his religious ideals she holds in contempt. Naturally enough they drift apart. Soon their worlds have little in common. The young minister's health fails; he seems entering a decline, and is induced to visit his sister in Nevada. She persuades him to take a missionary field in Eureka, a mining-town not many miles from her home. This he does. His wife in England is furious and declares she will obtain a divorce. She returns his letters unopened and refuses to see Vaughn's English friends whom the minister sends to visit her and strive to persuade her to join him in the Western home.

It is, however, chiefly with the strange and in many respects terrible Western mining-town and with the cultured, refined and wealthy inhabitants of Richmond Hill, which overlooks Eureka, that the tale is concerned. Here events varied in character, some bright and humorous, some gloomy and sinister, some thrillingly exciting and others darkly ominous, follow in quick succession.

The beautiful, refined and wealthy Katharine Chisholm falls in love with the Sage-Brush Parson, as Vaughn is called. He, too, feels the spell of her charm. They drift toward each other without either being conscious of the nature of the spell fate is weaving. At last the English wife appears. A terrible tragedy follows. The minister is accused of murder, tried, and sentenced to be hanged. He is reprieved and pardoned because of his innocence. The changed front of the town, the fidelity of Jack Perry, of Katharine and a few others, and the reaction on the establishment of Vaughn's innocence are vividly set forth.

Some passages are intensely dramatic and from first to last the interest of the reader is sustained. One scene is rather too suggestive of Mark Twain's Buck Fanshaw's Funeral to prove as effective as it otherwise would be, but as a whole the book comes to us as a realistic and faithful presentation of the rough, rugged life peculiar to the mining camp, and with the central figure a sort of Hamlet in the drama,—colossal, being composite as well as typical.

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