

## MYRTLE REED'S BOOK.

**AT THE SIGN OF THE JACK-O'-LANTERN.** By Myrtle Reed. One volume. Pp. 353. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$1.50. Also fine bindings for the holiday trade.

**A**T the Sign of the Jack-o'-Lantern" is the alluring title under which Myrtle Reed includes a curious mixture of solemn moral lessons, ponderous dissertations on the pursuit of literature as a profession, and a main theme which is the broadest kind of farce. She works these three seemingly incompatible elements fairly well together, but it is quite certain that it will be the exceptional reader who will not be inclined to skip the serious parts of the book in order to arrive more speedily at the amusing events which went on at the "Jack-o'-Lantern." In these events, be it said, probability and reason take absolutely no part, but absurdity is added to absurdity and impossibility to impossibility after a fashion more characteristic of comic opera than anything else, and the result is just about as satisfying mental food. However, Miss Reed is mistress of a delicacy of thought and style which lends itself gracefully to the light and airy exaggeration of human foibles, and most of her funnaking is very provocative of that quiet kind of chuckling on the reader's part which is sure proof of a pretty humor in the writer. Such touches as the naming of a cow Maud because she insisted upon going into the garden may not be a mark of the most intellectual kind of wit, but it savors so strongly of the home variety as to be immensely appealing to the risibilities.

"At the Sign of the Jack-o'-Lantern" is partly a study in the troublous processes by which the honeymoons of inexperienced young couples gradually merge into the quietudes of congenial married life and partly a frankly farcical tale of the adventures that befell a New York newspaper man and his bride when they tried to live in a queer old heirloom of a house bequeathed to them by an eccentric uncle. The uncle's life had been made so wretched by the visits of a numerous band of mercenary relatives that he had finally hit on the plan of accommodating the several families who insisted on spending their Summers with him by adding individual wings to the original house and further increasing the usefulness of these by outside stairways and kitchens. The peculiar arrangement of windows and doors in the front of the house, which was responsible for its nickname of the "Jack-o'-Lantern," was the result of a deliberate attempt on the part of the poor old man to frighten away such of his tormentors as might happen to arrive at Judson Centre on the 3 A. M. train—a fresh form of torture for which he anathematized the local railroad. At night, and with the proper disposal of lights in the windows, "the house was fearsome," according to village accounts.

Chapter I. discloses Harlan and Dorothy Carr inspecting their weird possession by candlelight and much depressed thereby. But newspaper men who have abandoned journalism for "literature" and married on the strength of an heirloom in the shape of a furnished house and a capital of \$297.23 cannot be too critical in the matter of abodes, and it was finally decided that the Jack o' Lantern would be just the place in which to write Harlan's first book—"so quiet and restful," said Dorothy. But hardly had the first page been written when the true inwardness of Uncle Ebenezer's gift began to appear. The relatives did not mean to let a little thing like change of ownership keep them from their annual visit to their own particular "wings," and they arrived singly and in groups of varying numbers. One can imagine the possibilities for developments in such materials, but it is better to let the author imagine for one and lazily enjoy her clever flights of fancy. The scene in the garden at midnight, with the relatives assembled to dig for the buried treasure, is certainly funny enough to repay one for reading the book, but there are many other scenes almost as mirth-provoking. While looked at in one way, the very serious view of his new profession taken by Mr. Carr is far and away the funniest thing in the book. We are not quite sure, though, that Miss Reed meant it that way.

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