

DRIFT OF LONDON LITERARY GOSSIP

Best Novel Competition Won by a Woman With Her First Book — Some Inferences Drawn.

LONDON, March 30.—Andrew Melrose, the publisher, has given me the result of his two-hundred-and-fifty-guinea prize competition for the best new novel, so that you in America may have the news by the time it is given to the English public. The prize, a thoroughly handsome one, for not every successful novel earns as much to its author, has been won by a lady, who uses the nom de guerre "Patricia Wentworth." She has won it with a romance of the French Revolution entitled "A Marriage Under the Terror," her first long novel, although she has written short stories. Mr. Melrose will publish the book here toward the middle of April, and on the same day the Putnams issue it in America.

A genuine literary competition is interesting on two accounts, for itself and for the light it throws on some particular phase of current authorship. A year or so ago Mr. Melrose, who is one of our younger publishers, and a man of fine literary tastes, had a two-hundred-and-fifty-guinea prize competition for the best first novel. The manuscripts were examined by Andrew Lang, W. L. Courtney, and Clement Shorter, and they gave the prize to Miss Jacob Hood, who did not use the last part of her name on the title page, for an admirably felt and written story, "The Faith of His Fathers." The novel was eminently good, one would say, rather than popular, but it easily found a circulation large enough to be a commercial as well as a literary success.

Now there was no first-novel qualification about Mr. Melrose's present competition—any writer who thought £262 10s worth having could enter. A hundred and sixty manuscripts were sent in, and of these some were by English novelists of standing, if not of the first rank. Of course, each manuscript simply bore a pseudonym, and nothing was known of the identity of any competitor until the literary jury had given its decision. This jury consisted of three women novelists, Mrs. Flora Annie Steel, Miss Mary Cholmondeley, and Mrs. Henry de la Pasture. One may say that they stand respectively for the best fiction of three classes which we get from women novelists; Mrs. Steel for the novel of literary workmanship and character study, Miss Cholmondeley for the artistic, melodramatic novel, and Mrs. de la Pasture for the novel of sweetness, humor, and a quiet domestic interest. That was the basis on which Mr. Melrose selected his jury, and the explanation is interesting.

First the whole hundred and sixty manuscripts were carefully read over in Mr. Melrose's office by three young Oxford men—a court of first instance. From this preliminary trial nearly a dozen emerged as being likely winners, and they were duly submitted to Mrs. Steel, Miss Cholmondeley, and Mrs. de la Pasture. Oddly enough not a manuscript had come from America, not one from the British colonies; all were from people in the British Isles. The general high quality of the stories is attested by Mr. Melrose's opinion that probably a third of them will eventually be published. He proposes himself to publish several besides the winner, "A Marriage Under the Terror," and, indeed, the story ranked second is said to show quite remarkable promise. It also is a first novel, so the "first-novelists" have scored all the time as against the practiced hands who entered this open competition.

That is worth noting, and another point to examine is this, that the topic and plot of Miss Patricia Wentworth's book concern the French Revolution. It has been the modern treasure house of the historical romance, so much so that we have all been regarding it as worked out, exhausted at least hackneyed. The lady judges probably had this thought in their minds when they took up "A Marriage Under the Terror" to read in manuscript. But, lo and behold, they independently and immediately came to the conclusion that what they had was an admirably fresh tale, gleaming with color and romance, however well digged the historic soil it came from. Miss Cholmondeley declared it a fine novel with high promise of winning a popular success. Mrs. de la Pasture said she had read it with quite eager interest. Mrs. Steel said ditto to both her friends and thus the verdict was unanimous.

Now it may or may not be that here is a noteworthy romance—the public will decide that for itself in the goodness of a little time. But certainly there must be something in a first novel which wins the praise of judges like Mrs. Steel, Mrs. de la Pasture, and Miss Cholmondeley. Perhaps we may say that every book worthy of that name must contain elements drawn from the life-thought of the author. It is

another way of putting the same thing to declare that everybody contains the material for one book, even if it never should be written. Well, it turns out that "Patricia Wentworth," from the time she began to write anything, looked forward to doing a romance of the French Revolution. That was the story which possessed her, which she must ultimately write, or be forever silent. She is a widow lady really. She has lived a good deal in India, and she has traveled considerably. Now, probably, she is launched on a career as a novelist, in which case it will not be possible for her—long to remain merely "Patricia Wentworth." Her name will come out, as authors' names always do, and why should it not, for it is exactly as musical an Irish name as that of Mr. John Dillon? Now, there!

JAMES MILNE.

AMONG THE AUTHORS.

PROF. JEREMIAH W. JENKS of Cornell University, author of "Governmental Action for Social Welfare," &c., served as an expert agent of the United States Industrial Commission on investigations of trusts and industrial combinations in the United States and Europe, as well as consulting expert of the United States Department of Labor on the same subject. He has also been Special Commissioner of the War Department to investigate questions of currency, labor, and internal taxation.

Eleanor Hoyt Brainerd, author of "The Personal Conduct of Belinda," &c., is an Iowan by birth who, when a girl of 18, found herself installed as a teacher in a boys' military school. Since then she has taught in a fashionable girls' boarding school in New York, and after that spent several years as a general reporter on a New York daily. Mrs. Brainerd recently purchased a farm on the Connecticut River, her ancestral home, where she is now engaged in writing fiction.

Henry C. Rowland, author of "In the Service of the Princess," writes that he has spent the last four years in studies and travels that have taken him to the Isthmus of Panama and through various countries in Europe. On one occasion he was wrecked off the coast of Turkey in a motor boat that he had himself constructed in London. Much of his journeying in Europe was done either by motor boat or bicycle.

G. Frederic Turner, author of the recent novel "Gloria," was educated at Harrow and Oxford, where he gained a reputation as a writer of amateur stories. For a number of years he has spent his holidays in Switzerland, whence he has obtained the atmosphere for his present novel. Mr. Turner is married to the younger daughter of George Grossmith, the English actor.

John Steventon, who has been announced as the author of "The Hermit of Capri," is now identified as John Steventon Tarkington, father of Booth Tarkington. The elder Mr. Tarkington, having passed his seventieth birthday, may be ranked as one of the oldest as well as the newest of Indiana authors. He and his son lived together for a time recently at Capri.

Mrs. Wilson Woodrow, in a recent interview, expressed herself as disagreeing with Mrs. Atherton's criticism of the American novel as "lacking background," declaring that "the background of our life is more varied than that of European life—that is all. In an American novel the background can seldom be taken for granted—it has to be defined."

Olive Briggs, author of the recent novel called "The Fir and the Palm," is the daughter of the Rev. Dr. Charles Augustus Briggs of New York City, who was tried for heresy by the New York Presbytery in 1892, and, although acquitted, was suspended the next year by the General Assembly.

Ada Foster Murray, who has contributed various poems from time to time to the leading magazines, and whose volume of verse, "Flower of the Grass," will shortly be published, is known in private life as Mrs. Henry Mills Alden, wife of the editor of Harper's Magazine.

Gouverneur Morris, author of "The Voice in the Rice," &c., is a grandson of the Gouverneur Morris, who was a Revolutionary statesman and United States Senator. Mr. Morris is a Yale graduate, and has been known for a number of years past as a writer of short stories.

A. Radclyffe Dugmore and Harry A. Franck have been chosen as the speakers at the annual banquet of the American Booksellers' Association, to be held in New York on the 11th of next month.

Anna Katharine Green, whose home is in Buffalo, is at present visiting in New York City.