

NOVEL NOTES



TO HAVE AND TO HOLD. By Mary Johnston. Boston: Houghton. \$1.50.

That those who made the United States and its history did their most romantic and picturesque work in Virginia has long been known to Virginians; to all the world, in truth, who have heard the name of Pocahontas. Some of these have striven to illustrate the same in literature, but it remained for these latter days, and the present revival of the historical novel, to bring forth *Prisoners of Hope* and *To Have and to Hold*.

Is it possible, one wonders, to convey in a mere novel note to the mind of the reader (the "gentle reader," it used to be!) a faithful reproduction of the extremely rare and delicate impression produced by these two tales, upon the mind of this present critic? The task makes one cry out for a spiritual (and perfected) phonograph. But perhaps our strongest impression is of surprise that one so young, both as woman and writer, should achieve at the very beginning so marked a style; for the two books have in common certain characteristics, as strongly marked as they are new to American fiction. And first of all, there is the Virginia climate; the heat of the day that thrills from Patricia's fan, as she watches the approach of the sloop that brings both her London finery and the hero of her life and of the story; and that parches the veins of Godfrey Landless as he toils at his unaccustomed labours in the field; there is the landscape, far and wide, of the Old Dominion; from the river on whose waters Ralph Percy floated with his bride to the Natural Bridge and the mystic haze of the blue mountains. The Chesapeake and its inlets, the forests and their glades and bridle paths, their interlacing vines and freedom from undergrowth, Miss Johnston knows, in storm and calm, under cloud and sunshine,

As one might know the delicate azure veins,
Each crossing each, on his beloved's wrist.

She knows, also, and has reproduced for us, the atmosphere of the times of which she

writes—rough, wild and daring, but pervaded by the subtle, elusive spirit which we call, and sometimes deride, as "Virginia chivalry." This, which John Esten Cooke, for example, laboriously and ineffectually sought to reach, Miss Johnston exhales; "in all its goodnesses, all its errors," it lives on every page; for one is not allowed to forget—though our author is no moralist—that such chivalry involves the assumption of the existence of a privileged class, which by no means looks upon the rest of the world as flesh of its flesh and bone of its bone. The exquisite "ladyhood," if we may employ the word, of Patricia, is her most attractive trait; Jocelyn Leigh is the same character, in an environment yet more romantic, with every line of the portrait retouched, each colour heightened and surrounded by an atmosphere even painfully dazzling, save for its mist of love and its clouds of sorrow and misfortune.

But we have been fairly overwhelmed of late with historical novels—stories of adventure in long past years—which, if they end tragically, leave us with the comfortable reflection that at least it happened so long ago that in any case the troubles of the unfortunate persons must long since have terminated; but which, by telling the story in the first person, give us the assurance that it is not the hero, at all events, who comes to irremediable grief in their pages. Sometimes one could perfectly well spare the hero, substituting his understudy with absolute composure; for many of these tales lack fatally in characterisation, elaborating a rôle, but leaving vague the personality of the actor. By no means, however, could we afford to dispense with the name or nature of Captain Ralph Percy; who, from his sitting down to rest, pipe in hand, after the work of the day, on the first page, strikes upon one's mental vision as a bold and distinct personality; as strong and as virile as Amyas Leigh himself. For, in fact, it is difficult, outside of the work of Charles Kingsley, to parallel the writing of this young Virginian

for the breathless sweep of the story, and its depth of insight and delicacy of handling, in regard to the human beings concerned therein. Kingsley, it is true, usually had some reform axe or other to grind when he set out to tell his tale (for which some of us, like him, perhaps, not at all the worse), of which technical misdemeanor our present author is altogether guiltless. Yet, despite this human reality of her personages, or perhaps because of it, she is in no respect a realist, but gains her effects by a few bold strokes, which set the character at once before us, with whom, as with any other living friend or, perchance, foe, we can at leisure pursue the acquaintance. For which method of hers, especially in her later story, one has reason to be distinctly grateful; the imagination shrinks and the flesh shudders at thought of what a realist, not to say a decadent, would have made of my Lord Carnal, the favourite of James I. of England. Miss Johnston sets him before us in his satanic beauty, illumined by Jocelyn's unfathomable angry contempt and loathing, and leaves us afterward to think of him according to his deeds; yet, evil as these are, one cannot altogether hate my Lord Carnal, however the manner of his exit from the story and the world may satisfy alike one's resentment and one's moral sense. And when we remember the attitude of the world toward his prototype (in truth, though shown in the tale as his rival and enemy), the elder Duke of Buckingham, we feel this conception of the character as historically justified.

We can hardly avoid a reference to the ending of *Prisoners of Hope*, which causes, we are told, the book to be invariably closed with a bang. Yet not only was any other than a tragic finale historically impossible, not only is the conclusion as it stands pre-eminently unconventional and original, but one rather fancies that it embodies a veritable legend of Old Virginia.

But we confess that we were glad that no such necessity existed in the case of Ralph and Jocelyn, and that Miss Johnston had the courage, despite the popularity of her tragedy, to allow them to be happy forever after. Two pitfalls we see foresee for her in the future: she may accentuate historic truth to the point of realism—there is already a strengthening of her touch, though it has by no means passed due and proper limits—and she may go on producing variants of Jocelyn Leigh, in the rôle of heroine. We shall watch with interest for the third novel of this young writer.

Katharine Pearson Woods.

VIA CRUCIS. A ROMANCE OF THE SECOND CRUSADE. By F. Marion Crawford. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$1.50.

Mr. Crawford is certainly one of the most extraordinary figures in contemporary literature. Of undoubted talent as a spinner of tales, as a "pot boiler" he reaches positive genius. "Pot boiling" he has raised to the dignity of a calling that is not only respectable, but honourable—also lucrative; and his success is all the more amazing and praiseworthy because in the construction of his books he uses none of those tricks and stock devices upon which a very much greater man, Alexandre Dumas the first, was so dependent. In these words there is nothing invidious. Mr. Crawford at his worst is usually preferable to most contemporary writers at their best. His most palpably padded page possesses a vigour, a power, a straightforwardness—in short, a real worth that is very lacking in the work of many who go about yawping of the sacredness of their "art." His latest novel is very much like a great many that he has before given us—an intelligent if not very convincing plot, two or three rather striking figures, some admirable description, and dialogue that is always very sane and entertaining. When one of Mr. Crawford's characters begins to talk about his soul, he does so with a frankness and ingenuousness which disarms hostility. In placing the story of *Via Crucis* in the twelfth century, Mr. Crawford builds his romance on a situation which belongs essentially to the life of the old world. For prototypes of the love story of the Lady Goda and Sir Arnold de Curboil, one must go to the tragedies of the early Elizabethan dramatists.

The scene of *Via Crucis* shifts from England to the French court, thence to Rome, back to the French court, and then in the wake of the crusading army to the arid sands of Syria. The hero, Gilbert Warde, is half monk and half barbarian. His father is treacherously killed by Sir Arnold de Curboil, who marries his victim's wife within a month after her husband's death. Gilbert, foully wounded by Sir Arnold and cheated of his heritage, is forced out into the world as an adventurer. Arriving at the French court, his great torso and gentle manner win the love of the beautiful Queen Eleanor, whom tradition likes best to show us in her hideous old age administering the chalice of poison to the beautiful Rosamund. Fired by religious zeal, Gilbert wends his way to Rome, the strange Rome of those days which