

Literary.

Is Bret Harte losing his skill in story-telling. His last effort in the *Century* will hardly add anything to his reputation. On the whole it is rather a rambling, desultory, inconsequential sort of a narrative, but enlivened at intervals by characteristic touches in which even the most casual reader could not fail to recognize the hand of the author. The Kentucky girl talks western slang with a southern accent, probably the result of some previous residence in California, which is hinted at rather than expressed. How she acquired her thoroughly western manner is less evident. However, she is not lacking in native wit, and very cleverly gives the Scotch-Englishman, a chance acquaintance, the benefit of her ideas on Highland scenes. Right here the author unconsciously or otherwise cannot refrain from making a slight comparison of the land of the Scots with his own beloved California, to manifest disadvantage of the former in western eyes. The chance acquaintance proves to be the true but unappreciative heir of the McHulishes, not loath to part with his desert island for American gold, and we close the magazine wondering whether the lady from Kentucky was prevailed upon by the consul's western friend, or by her daughter at the instigation of the dissipated youth from MacCorkleville to embark in the fruitless enterprise.

It is below Harte's usual standard, and does not do him justice by any means. His inimitable sketches of life in the Sierras would lead us to expect something better. He has contributed more than any other man to the literature of that interesting but over-described region, and it is a relief to turn occasionally from the ponderous style and heavy metaphor of some more pretentious writers who really never wrote anything half so delightful, to one of his breezy sketches.

Many of his stories are like zephyrs wafted over wavering plains and snowy mountain tops, and as apparently aimless. They come

to us laden perhaps with the scent of the pure forests and with very little else. Mere seeming vagaries of an imagination that delights in the aspects of nature taken unawares, and as guiltless of motive or purpose as some of his own characters. These creations may be justified, if justification is needed, on the plea of art for art's sake, and some of them are the very embodiment of art. Others of his sketches, however, for they are not all so charmingly illogical, are most vivid pictures of the life of the mining camp and frontier towns. At times showing us the very depths of human misery and vice, yet investing even these very often with a glamour and a jaunty air that while they are not intended to, and do not deceive us as to their real nature, win our admiration for their skillful handling. What though his heroes are gamblers and highwaymen, adverse circumstances shaped the careers of many of them, and they were none the less men for a' that. John Oakhurst willingly sacrifices his life for the "Outcasts of Poker Flat," and Jack Hamlin, in addition to his wonderful nerve and skill at play is not lacking in generosity and fair-mindedness. They are not border ruffians, but rather the unicorns of a former respectability. There is something wonderful about even their greatest achievements and successes, which are met with the equanimity of habitual manners.

Harte's style is indescribable but unmistakable. Lazy description is succeeded by action with startling suddenness, and yet in such a provokingly subdued manner that we wonder whether anything has really happened and turn back to read it again. He is fond of introducing incongruous persons in incongruous places, and then ingeniously adapting them to their surroundings in a way that might be ludicrous if it were not so well done. We cannot help feeling that he is in sympathy with his own characters, erring human beings though they often are.

There is a slight tinge of philosophy in many of his works that is not incompatible with the nature of his subjects. His heroines