

Books and Bookmen

Dad in Politics, and For Life:
Steele Rudd. (Sydney: New South Wales Bookstall Co.)

These two books contain a number of vigorously and humorously written short stories, illustrative of the political and social back-block life of North-West Australia. "Dad in Politics" will be keenly relished by those interested in the land question, and the part that the Government should play in it. An assumptive Government bill, brought before the House of Assembly, in Brisbane, is an amazing example of the legislature sought to be foisted on a credulous people by a presumably paternal Government. This measure, facetiously called "A Land Betterment Bill," specially framed to deal with improved values, is brought before the House in confident expectation of being supported by Dad (who has been unwittingly bribed by gift of a place for his son-in-law), who has proved a formidable member of the Opposition.

The Treasurer, a sturdy, pompous, Cromwellian sort of politician with a Scotch accent, rose and began his second reading speech on "A Land Betterment Bill," he explained all the beauties and perfections of that bill; said he had a lot of faith in it; that it was to be the salvation of the country, and was confident that members would find the principle embodied in it simple and easily understood. "Whoso maketh a thing," he said, "whoso createth a value, to him that thing or value belongs." (Loud cheers from the Government benches.) "Let me illustrate my meaning," he went on. "Suppose John Smith buys 100 acres of land at £1 per acre; and suppose further that he improves and clears that land, or spends money or labour on it equal to £4 per acre, then everyone must recognise that John Smith has a property right in that land to the extent of £500." Everyone did; they got up and cheered the prophet. "But," he continued confidently, "further suppose that a railway is built into the district where that land is, and the value of John Smith's holding is increased thereby in value from £5 to £8 per acre, then it must be clear to everyone that if John Smith has a property right in the £5 per acre which he created, the community which added another £3 per acre to the value of the land has a property right in that increased value—"

"That's a LIE; 'twould be a robbery!" Dad shouted.
Dissect.
"Order!" the Speaker cried. "The honourable member must not impute—"
The rest of the rebuke was lost in a loud "hear, hear!" that came from the Government.
"So long as John Smith can fairly claim," the Treasurer went on, "that his land is only worth £500, then this bill does not propose to ask one penny from him, but when John Smith himself admits that the community has added a value to his land, then this bill will ask half of that value from John Smith."
"My God!" Dad exclaimed, throwing his head back and opening wide his mouth. (Loud, decisive laughter from the Government, and "Order!" from the Speaker.)
"I submit that the equity and moderation of such a proposal," the Minister resumed, fanning the air with pages of his written speech, "cannot be disputed" (hear, hear), "and, as Mill pointed out, the claims of the community—"
"Who th' devil is Mill?" Dad shouted, leaning forward in his seat.

It will be patent to the reader that Dad had yet to make acquaintance with Stuart Mill on "Political Economy," and on Dad inquiring in unparliamentary language who Mill was, a scene occurred. Order having been restored,

Once more the Treasurer got under way, and explained the meaning of "improved value" and "betterment." "No person," he said, "is to be charged for betterment until that person admits the betterment. The owner's valuation will be taken, and the Treasurer cannot alter that valuation, and there will be no litigation about it. But" here Dad shifted in his seat and leaned forward to catch all he said: "the Treasurer may advise the Crown to resume the land at the owner's valuation, with 10 per cent added for compensation—"
"Aha!" Dad snorted, "Aha!" (Laughter from Government supporters, and "Order!" from Mr. Speaker.)

Then the Treasurer quoted Mill again, and read chunks of wisdom from "Principles of Political Economy," and concluded by saying that he himself was fully persuaded that, if the bill became law, it would be "a great guide—it would be an unworked blade in the hand" for the nation of "A" country. (Loud and enthusiastic cheers from the Government.)

The Leader of the Opposition and the member for Targo rose in turn and pelleted the bill; then Dad caught the Speaker's eye.

For Dad's reply the reader must be referred to the book, both in fairness to the author and for lack of space.

Socialism being the leading topic of "the man in the street," it will be interesting as well as edifying to read Dad's opinion on Socialism, which is at the same time reasonably trenchant and sound.

"Sandy's Loss" will be found reminiscent of old penal settlement days. The author's account of how he wrote "On Our Selection" will be read with mingled optimism and pessimism by those who are desirous of entering the literary arena.

Regarding the establishing of a purely Australian school of literature, the following advice of the author is commendable for its sound common sense:—

Does literature pay? Not so well as wool, or beer, or town properties, or old clothes, perhaps. Still it "pays." And to prospective Australian authors I say: Let your first book be equal to "Robbery Under Arms," or "While the Billy Boils," or "The Man from Snowy River"; your second not worse, and your third a lot better; use your brains on the publishers, and I see no reason why your incomes should not average £800 per annum. Should England "call," by all means pack up and clear; but, until she "does," play in your own back-yard—write "in Australia," "on" Australia, "for" Australia.

"A Bush Tragedy" is a story of the penalty of infidelity in the bush.

"For Life" is the primary story of Steele Rudd's second book, and tells how the author, when a journalist, accompanied a body of police who were trying to sheep home to a notorious criminal a series of particularly brutal murders, by forcing him to go back on his tracks for the time that had supervened since the murders had been committed, and so establish an alibi.

"On the Condamine," "Charley's Yarn," "Dinny Delaney's Industry," and "Out Driving," are typical Australian stories, and are eminently readable. The books are suitably illustrated, and should secure a host of readers, as they are both crisp and humorous in style. The most serious blemish of the book lies in the senseless repetition of the phrase, "twenty-five years ago," which is to be found in the story entitled "The Selection Where I was Reared." Very few writers can afford to indulge in repetition, and in this case it is an absolute disfiguration of style. But, in spite of this, these little books are highly commendable, not only for their own sake, but as opening up a wide field of possibilities for the coming school of Australasian literature.

A Sheaf of Corn: Mary E. Mann. (London: Methuen's Colonial Library, 36, Essex-street.)

I went a pilgrim through the universe,
And communed oft with strangers as I strayed,
In every corner some advantage found,
And from each sheaf of corn I drew a blade.

From the lines that head this review, Mrs. Mann has found inspiration to depict nineteen short stories, or, figuratively speaking, blades. And, luckily for readers at large, few out of the innumerable harvests that are garnered bring forth such unwholesome grain as that contained in the blades of this book. The stories are well and realistically written, but are depressing to the last degree.

In "The Women of Dulditch" we are treated to the spectacle of busom immorality triumphing over unattractive virtue.

"Clouayne's Clerk" is a story of a consumptive youth whose zeal and fidelity to his employer's interests is rewarded by increased demands upon his time without a corresponding increase in his salary, and to whom tardy recognition is offered too late to save his life.

"In a Teashop" is demonstrated by the old adage, "If you want anything badly, go straight for it and grab it."

"A Chalk Mark on a Gate" will remind the reader of the lines, "It shall suspect where is no cause of fear." And, in short, the writer of these really well-written, if pessimistic, stories has run through the whole gamut of human frailty, both moral and physical, to find material to depress an already sufficiently depressed world of readers. In these days of "the threatened degradation of the modern novel," writers of the

calibre of Mrs. Mann (who wields an uncommonly arresting, if too realistic, pen) cannot be too strongly urged to relegate the depiction of the shady side of Nature to the obscurity to which it so deservedly belongs, and depict life as it might be, and as it is to the humblest

seeker after the ideal. Ideals, not realism, is the ultimate goal of every writer who is in the running for immortality. We are indebted to Messrs. Withman and Arty for our copy of this book.

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(Signed) (Mrs.) M. LEWIS, Wordsly House, Stonnall, near Walsall.

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