The Bookshelf.

By DELTA.

REVIEWS.

Open Country: A Comedy with a Sting. Maurice Hewlett. London: Macmillan and Co.).

MR. HEWLETT is to the fore again as the advocate of free love. That he writes sublimely and inimitably about nature and most of her mundane things, and that his heroines, generally speaking, are models of pagan, or intensely human femininity, we cheerfully concede. But we contend with all sincerity, and without any idea of posing as an extreme purist, that the teaching of his hero (John Senhouse) is purely pagan, and therefore injurious from a moral point of view. "Open Country" has been written, primarily, in order that the author's past readers may renew their acquaintance with Senhouse of "Halfway House" fame. As a delineator of nature in all her moods, and often as a philosopher or an idealist, we not only admire but respect John Senhouse. But we abhor him as a teacher of youth, and in particular as a teacher of feminine youth. "Sanchia Josepha Percival" (the heroine of this story) is declared by Senhouse to be a reincarnation of that goddess whom the ancient Greeks called Artemis, and the Romans Diana. The second villain of the book, who plays Endymion to Sanchia's Artemis, is a certain Nevile Ingram, who has never been denied anything in his life that he set his heart upon. Senhouse, in spite of all Mr. Hewlett's glamour, plays the part of the Sidonian Mentor in this so-called comedy. The rest of the dramatis personae are merely incidentals necessary to the action of the plot. Those readers acquainted with the classics, and with Mr. Hewlett's inimitable skill in the art of moving his players in any game of life, and particularly that of the game of love, will follow the moves of this modern Artemis with conflicting emotions according to the clarity of their moral outlook upon life. When we think of a Sanchia Josepha Percival, sacrificed on the altar of love to a Nevile Ingram, we cry out, with Othello, of "the pity of it." Those readers who are not acquainted with the classics will do well to beg, borrow, or steal a Lempriere, before reading this book, as Mr. Hewlett, though not so obscure as the late George Meredith, is as subtle in expressing his meanings as that great master. We do not purpose to divulge the whole of this story, but advise all adult readers to buy the book, (this is no book for youth), and judge for themselves who was most to blame for the sting in this comedy. We are emphatically of the opinion that at John Senhouse's door lies the blame of the whole matter. Sanchia came to Senhouse as wax, therefore with him lies the blame that on her mind was left "the impression of strange kinds," by ill moulding. We respect Senhouse where he says: "No harm can ever come to a good woman. No; but horrible evil is done the world when such an one is put in peril. The moral sense is shocked, the standard falls; if the flag flies still it flies as a braggart and a liar. Women in his view are so infinitely higher than men, being capable of lengths of enthusiasm and sacrifice which men never become aware of, that mere honour is stultified if such a danger is allowed. The state of a man becomes revolting if such a danger is allowed." But we despise him utterly from a moral point of view, when his pupil becomes as a "god unconcerned with the good and evil which temper and try the consciences of men." But a fig for Mr. Hewlett's paganistic vapourings. These ancient gods and goddesses were but myths, and only typify what is worst in man. For though Sanchia Josepha Percival were cast in the mould of an Artemis, she would never have come to life if Senhouse had not breathed into her. And if Senhouse had cast himself in the role of a Perseus, Endymion would have slept on unkissed, and untempted, and this modern representation of another garden of Eden tragedy would have been spared the reader. Exit John Senhouse as false teacher.

With John Senhouse's spirited protest against modernity we are more or less in sympathetic agreement. The State as the Whiteley of England, with the heads of departments as shopwalkers, and with the English people as forced buyers, would be indeed, we think, a worsening of present conditions. After State socialism Mr. Hewlett prophesies anarchy, then poverty temperance and sincerity, redeunt Saturnia regna. This he declares is his Cumaean plan for England's salvation. We regret that space forbids further mention of John Senhouse's forecasts, views, opinions and philosophies, and can only reiterate our advice to readers to buy the book, which, but for its pagan tendency, and in spite of its pagan tendency, is a literary feast. We are indebted to the courtesy of Macmillan and Co. for our copy of "Open Country," which is very "open country" indeed.

The Smiths of Valley View. Being Further Adventures of the Smiths of Surbiton. Keble Howard. (London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne: Cassell and Co. Auckland: Wildman and Arey.)

Keble Howard, like Jerome K. Jerome, marvels at the scant and contemptuous attention the great middle-class of England receives from novelists as a field of exploitation for fictional purposes. "To write of the middle classes, in short, is a confession of mediocrity," says this author. "They do not understand, you see, how much more difficult it is to get an effect without flying to extremes. They admit, readily enough, that the middle classes are the mainstay of England, but venture to write about them, save in the blessed spirit of satire, and artistically you are forthwith doomed." But Mr. Howard, with a courage worthy of his aforetime reputation, defies popular disparagement, and in this sequel to "The Smiths of Surbiton," proves conclusively that in this seldom exploited field, there is material that, handled in a natural or an ideal manner, could not fail to imbue the reader with the conviction that not only is an incalculable amount of good raw material going to waste, but that in this class is to be found embedded the roots of those virtues that have made England what she is. Men's hearts, from which all the virtues worth the counting, spring, become atrophied by repression. The upper class has by repression almost lost its heart, because it has learned to look upon repression as a mark of high breeding. The lower classes, God help them, as a whole, have little or no expression that is not brutal or sordid, because they, too, have brought repression to a sombre art. So that any writer who wishes to depict English life at its best and worst, in the most natural and in the most utilitarian surrounding, must go to its middle class, first casting off the spectacles of modern prejudice, and with a perfectly open mind. The sex problem novel has lost its first grip on the public—the morbidly or impossible sensational is doomed, the sentimental no longer satisfies, and no material now remains for successful manipulation but the historically romantic or the topical. But what the reading public never tires of is the being brought into touch with the usage, and the heart of life. And, owing to the repression of the upper classes, and the brutal indifference of the lower classes, it is impossible to get into touch with the real heart of life except through the medium of its middle-classes. How interesting, how lovable, and how worthy in many ways of emulation is this class, which, kindly hearted, and with no insensate social or political ambition to curtail its expression, has time to cultivate its neighbours' acquaintance, and the wherewithal and the will to minister to its poorer neighbour's needs. Of this class are the "Smiths of Valley View." By their medium we are shown marriage as an ideal state, children who love and honour their parents, servants whose greatest ambition is to be worthy of their employer's consideration. There are chapters purely sentimental, chapters that have an element of the tragic in them, chapters that overflow with humour, and wisdom, chapters utilitarian, and chapters that are wholly homely and graphically descriptive of the life and feeling of the great middle class. Suburbia, to us, in future, will instead of being regarded as the happy hunting ground of the satirist, be regarded by us as the readers' oasis in the desert of prurient or mediocre literature that is at present flooding the market of fiction.

Peter-Peter: A Romance Out of Town. Maud Radford Warren. (London and New York: Harper Brothers. Auckland: Wildman and Arey).

A more delightfully humorous exposition of an old nursery rhyme than this story of

"Peter-Peter, pumpkin eater,
Who had a wife and couldn't keep her;
So put her in a pumpkin shell
And there he kept her very well."

could not well be imagined.

The actors in this dainty farce which brims over with bright humour and smart dialogue are Peter-Peter, his wife, his wife's sister, his wife's sister's lover, his friend the editor, and their boarder, the beautiful school-mistress. Out of this cast, and the old couplet the reader must fashion for himself a romance of sorts. If he is lacking in imagination, we counsel him to do as we did, viz., read the book, which will amply repay his expenditure of time and money.

"Victory, eh! Gosh! It must have been a close fight."

The White Prophet: Hall Caine. (London: William Heinemann. 2 vols., 4/ net.)

There is a great difference of opinion amongst the great "Home" critics as to the merits of Mr Hall Caine's much discussed book, "The White Prophet." Avowedly written to clear up some of the misunderstandings that prevail between east and west, it is not only ineffective, but actually mischievous in tendency, according to the criticism of those two eminent writers, Dr. William Barry and Mr Douglas Sladen, whose criticisms we append. Mr. Sladen says:—"It may be asked how I had the audacity to write a novel simultaneously with one of the greatest living novelists, upon the same subject, and from an almost diametrically opposite point of view. I do this because I think that Mr. Hall Caine has been misinformed, and has committed a great injustice. As the father of a soldier, and as one who has spent six months on the spot studying the question, I felt bound to challenge the false light in which he presents the British Army of Occupation in Egypt to the public." While Dr. Barry stigmatises the book as playing to that gallery Mr Hall Caine so dearly loves, and whom we are bound to say so dearly loves him.

BOOKSHELF FEUILLETON.

Mr. J. P. Grossmann's splendid articles on deforestation, which appeared in serial form some time ago in the "Weekly Graphic," are now to be had in book form at the modest price of eighteenpence. The striking illustrations, which served both to embellish and illimine Mr. Grossmann's text, are included in the booklet, which will be heartily welcomed, not only by those who read the articles as they appeared, but also those who from dislike of reading anything in instalments have not yet read them. So impressed are we with the evils of deforestation as depicted by Mr Grossmann, and the urgent need in our midst of some regular and scientific scheme of afforestation, that we cordially wish this reprint the wide circulation its subject demands.

BOOKSHELF NOTES AND COMMENTS.

Those readers who are privileged to receive "The Times" regularly will scarcely recognise in the writer of a short trenchant letter to the "Times" of July 7, on "English M.P.'s and Indian Anarchism," the writer of some of the most popular novels about India ever published. Mrs. Steele's best, perhaps, was "On the Face of the Waters," a story which dealt with the siege of Delhi during the Indian Mutiny. Her latest, "A Prince of Dreamers," contained a masterly portrait of Akbar, the greatest of the Mogul Emperors, and the builder of the great red fort at Agra. Another work of hers deserving mention is "India Through the Ages." We express no opinion on the question raised by Mrs. Steele in her letters beyond saying that it seems unnecessary to assume there is disloyalty in every question asked in Parliament which appears to criticise the action of the Indian Government.

A feature of "Life" for October is the third of a series of unconventional pictures of monarchs. Alphonso, the King of Spain, was snapshotted by the "Tatler's" photographer in the act of pacifying his eldest daughter.

Mark Twain's onslaught on Shakespeare has given a fillip to the old Shakespeare-Bacon controversy, and a Mr. W. S. Booth has published "Some Acrostic Signatures of Francis Bacon." The "Dial" comments on the performance as capable of being taken for either the jeu d' esprit of a wag or the insane utterance of a monomaniac, were it not that the author is regarded by his friends as a rational being writing in a serious mood. If anyone has the curiosity to make the experiment, he will be surprised to discover how easily, by the Boothian mode of procedure, acrostic signatures, whether of Bacon or of Booth, or of any one else, can be ciphered out in any piece of prose or verse, even in the columns of his daily newspaper.

"The Garden of Women" is the title