

WOMEN IN LETTERS.

(By Mrs. Fred Aronson.)

It is interesting to learn that in a recent speech Mr. Balfour objected strongly to the gloomy spirit of modern fiction, adding that he put forth a plea for literature that would cheer him up. Mr. A. St. John Adecock follows up this somewhat platitudinal assertion by remarking that several of the most recent books of fiction were not calculated to make anybody but an undertaker look cheerful. Even if only a small analysis is made of these comments a greater part of them must be admitted as true, as it is curious that of late years several of our most gifted fiction writers have given us excellent romances, but many of which have been charged with suffering and gloom, and shadowed with tragedy. It is to be hoped that perhaps the open remarks of such a world famous personage as Mr. Balfour will alter the coming atmosphere a little of the fiction yet unborn. For we have, it is true, quite enough sorrow in our menu of daily life without seeking it out for recreation use at our fireside and in our homes.

The depressing influence noted is perhaps more prominent amongst the women writers than the men—because it is said the average woman who writes takes herself and her public so seriously that she has no time for even suggestions of "wit and humour." The mantle (as a rule) of such mirth-makers as W. W. Jacobs, Walter Emanuel, Pett-Ridge, and Jerome have not fallen on her—she seeks instead the most harrowing and lugubrious details of life, of realism, or of mental imagination; in this way building up for herself and her reading public a type of book that often leaves a nasty taste in the mouth, and not unfrequently disturbs and injures a youthful mind. For it must never be forgotten that books as a rule leave marks on the mind, and when these marks are unhealthy the mental balance must often suffer.

Whilst on this subject of the growth of literary depression it may not be out of place to mention a book only recently published that has given the gloomily mournful-reading lover something to appreciate—that "Young Nietzsche," being the first volume of a biography of the Philosopher, written by a woman—his sister, Frau Forster Nietzsche, who was his companion and nurse during the last years of his sufferings. She had all her life kept almost every scrap of paper belonging to her brother that contained any notes or any of his writings. The biography is, therefore, almost unique, and of a particularly intimate and touching character, but depressing all the same. Still, although a woman's work, is extremely well done, giving a living picture of the young man if not a very remarkable one of the boy, London critics declaring that the book should afford great pleasure to those "who express eagerness to know something of the intimate life of great men." The older Nietzsche, it should be remembered, was a

the intimate life of great men. The older Nietzsche, it should be remembered, was a solitary man—a pessimist, who traced all our morals to sources of which we cannot feel proud. But in the "Young Nietzsche" the world may behold a bright spirit who was not concerned to deny moral values, but who because he saw life sweetly saw it steadily and sanely.

Amongst those who know, the report is current that Miss Winifred James, like a wise woman, is indulging in a holiday from authorship. The success she has gathered from her anonymous book, "Letters to My Son," has permitted her to take a sea voyage, which is to include a visit to the West Indies. Perhaps she has been fired by what Gertrude Atherton revealed about that district in her delightful book, "Julia France and Her Times." In any case Miss James is certain to bring back travel peeps of special charm, for if there is one thing this Australian writer can do it is to carry romantic realism very close to one's fireside. Miss James to her intimate friends is one of those women who draw and fascinate—she is never at a loss to bring virile humour into ordinary chatter, while her heart seems built out of the very best materials that go to make up that part of our anatomy. The West Indies should offer much "copy" for anyone gifted with imagination and personality. The noted glorious scenic effects may help to give us some pen pictures of lasting delight.

At the women writers' dinner held last month in London on June 20th, my friend Mrs. Alice Perrin—the president of the Women Writers' Association—took the chair. In a letter from London I am told that some handsome jewels were the rule but smart frocks the exception, yet the dinner was so brilliant and the numerous personalities so absorbing that one forgot everything except the fact that it was a gathering of some of the cleverest women of the day. Amongst them probably the most brilliant was Mrs. Elinor Glyn, the author of so many of the brightest bits of fiction that belong to very modern writings.

Mrs. Glyn stood out of the crowd, showing the whitest, youngest, and most beautiful

throat imaginable. Her pale complexion, dark eyes and black eyebrows, mated to masses of bright red hair, making her quite remarkable. Chatting to her for some time were Lady Troubridge (the sister of Lady Dudley and the writer of several books of fiction) and Lady Doughty (Miss Eugenie Stone of Melbourne). Another striking woman present was Mrs. Julia Frankau (Frank Danby), who also possesses a strange magnetic personality. Mrs. Perrin was described as a handsome, dark-haired woman, with a "nice, wholesome look" and a great amount of energy—not at all one's idea of the Anglo-Indian writer, worn out with the languor of the tropics. Flora Anna Steel was also noted with white hair, and a clever, weather-beaten face, and she made one of the great speeches of the night. Surrounded as it

beaten face, and she made one of the great speeches of the night. Surrounded, as it were, with a grey atmosphere, wearing a grey frock and glasses, a quiet little woman was Miss Beatrice Harraden, while Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes was not missing, with smoothly parted hair, a bonny face, and big, kind eyes, nor were Mrs. Ellen Thornycroft Fowler or Mrs. Baillie-Reynolds. Mrs. John Lane, the brilliant American wife of the well-known publisher, was the centre of an admiring little crowd, and owned to having another book under way. More literary women included Mrs. Marjorie Bowen, Miss Violet Hunt, Miss McNaughten. Mrs. Mary Gaunt, and the Countess Arnim, who was a Miss Beauchamp, of Sydney, and was born at Admiralty House in the days when the Beauchamp family owned the beautiful place—the author, as one knows, of "Elizabeth and Her German Garden." Australia for the occasion sent Mrs. Roy Batty, Mrs. Frank Gibson, Mrs. Ethel Mills Primrose, and Miss Quinlan, a daughter of the late Judge Quinlan, of Victoria. The evening was in every way particularly delightful, while the assemblage of such a collection of feminine brains was a decided credit to the mental advancement and development of Great Britain and her colonies.

Contrary to the habits of many Australian women journalists, who seldom seem to get beyond the business of providing "copy" for their newspapers, Miss Mary Grant Bruce, on the staff of the Melbourne "Age," has just published a charmingly written story of the bush, and called it "Timothy in Bushland," dealing with the strange adventures of a small boy in the drought-stricken parts of Victoria. The author, who is considered one of Melbourne's ablest writers, has a keen insight into the life of the selector and the mind of the child. Miss Bruce is a tall, interesting woman, with lots of cheery fun and wit in her conversation, and the knack of making friends when opportunity offers. She is a prominent member of the "Writers' Club" of Melbourne, which meets every Friday for tea and talk, and at times has also the pleasure of entertaining travelling "hons and licenses" who may pass through the Federal city.

Miss Margaret Bryant has been receiving quite a shower of literary laurel leaves in London through the recent publication of "The Adjustment." Miss Bryant is honoured with the criticism that she is a writer whose power of creating original and dramatic situations in the midst of which move characters as complex as they are true to life, is much enhanced by the delightful style in which the book is written. This praise is made more prominent by the addition of the remark "that the most superficial of fiction readers will not skip a single page or even a line of the most enthralling story."

The heroine, in addition to other charms, possesses an unusually self-reliant nature and an indomitable will. Brought up by a Quaker mother in the heart of the country, she is plunged into the whirl of London society life and emerges from it unscathed—her ideals as high as ever, and her delightful ways of thought and speech but little

checked by the bonds of etiquette and conventionalism. A vivid human interest is centred in the book and makes it almost a matter of difficulty to place it aside before it is finished. Set upon the shelf with "He who Passed," "The Adjustment" will probably have an equal number of admirers among those who read fiction written by women in their best manner, mood, and style.