

Some Clerical Novelists.

BY CHARLES

MACMILLAN.

IT is a fact worthy of comment that many clergymen and ministers are numbered amongst the most prominent novelists of the day. There is something incongruous in this, and yet some of the greatest reforms effected within the last sixty years have in the first place been brought about by the pen of the novelist. No one will deny that among social reformers, Charles Dickens, Charles Reade and Mrs. Beecher Stowe are by no means to be despised, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is undoubtedly the most remarkable instance of a novel achieving the end for which it was written. The thrill of this simple story went round the world, and, though slavery has long ceased to exist in America, inquiries among the publishers elicit the fact that large numbers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are still sold every year.

Charles Dickens's father—and consequently his wife and family—suffered much from the cruel debtors' laws that then existed, and from very early years there was growing in his son that horror of the debtor's prison which was for the first time made public in the *Pickwick Papers*, and which, so to speak, knocked the first nail in its coffin. Likewise, *Oliver Twist* sounded the first death knell of Bumble-dom. *Bleak House* and *Nicholas Nickleby* helped onwards several social reforms, and the novelist's



REV. CHARLES KINGSLEY.
Author of "Westward Ho!"

pen picture of *Poor Joe* set people thinking about the responsibilities lying at their very doors and the crying needs of the waifs and strays in the land in which they lived.

Charles Reade's famous book, *It is Never too Late to Mend*, put fresh spirit into the work of prison reform so nobly begun by Howard and Elizabeth Fry, and his attacks on the cruel treatment of criminals in those days roused the conscience of the nation. Seven years later his novel, *Hard Cash*, created a desire for the reform of the iniquitous system of private lunatic asylums then in vogue. The most recent instance of a "novel with a purpose"

gaining the end its author had in view was the late Sir Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, which directly resulted in the building of the People's Palace in Whitechapel, and, indirectly, in the foundation of large numbers of clubs and institutions for working people.

This points to the fact that the pen can be made as potent for good as the pulpit. The Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, Alexander McLaren, Canon Gore, and other great preachers have recognised this, and thousands have read their printed sermons who have never heard them preach. But, so far, no clerical novelist, with one notable exception, has been the means of inculcating any great social reform.



REV. C. M. SHELDON,
Author of "What would Jesus do?"
Photo Russell and Sons.



Photo] REV. JOHN WATSON, D.D. (IAN MACLAREN.) [*Geo. Newnes, Ltd.*
Author of "Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush."

Their stories have been stories pure and simple, but who knows that one of them may not some day write a book bearing as fruitful results as any of those just mentioned?

The one clerical novelist who also merits the title of social reformer is, of course, Charles Kingsley. His stories are widely read at the present time, particularly his delightful fairy tale *Water Babies*, which brought happier times to the boy chimney sweeps of this country. *Water Babies* had not long been published before it attracted Queen Victoria's attention, and her kindly heart was moved on reading of the cruel sufferings of the little chimney climbers, and under her influence a movement was set on foot which led to the abolition of a cruel and barbarous custom.

So much has been said and written about the Rev. Charles M. Sheldon and the marvellous manner in which his stories, first told unpretentiously on Sunday evenings to the congregation in his little Kansas church, eventually set the people of two continents talking, that more need hardly be said here

about *In His Steps, or, What Would Jesus Do?* and others of Mr. Sheldon's novels.

Few literary reputations have been more quickly made than that of "*Ian Maclaren*," and there is no doubt that the world of letters would have been considerably poorer had not Dr. John Watson entered it as a novelist. In fact he and Mr. S. R. Crockett have done much to further popularise the school of fiction in which J. M. Barrie scored some of his greatest successes. The success which Dr. Watson has secured as a novelist, however, is but little, to my mind, to be compared with the living fame his "*Life of Jesus Christ*" will bring him in "the days" to come. It will be remembered that it appeared in the first twelve numbers of *The Sunday Strand*, and is still having a large sale in the bound vols. i and ii.

From Ian Maclaren one's thoughts seem to turn naturally to the Rev. S. R. Crockett. Some of his books have not infrequently been confused with those of Dr. Watson's; but of later years Mr. Crockett has proved himself to be no less versatile than prolific. The MS. of many famous novelists are the despair of printers, but Mr. Crockett's are all that could be desired. For the sake of speed he usually makes use of the typewriter, but his handwriting, in which his corrections and alterations are made, is beautifully legible.

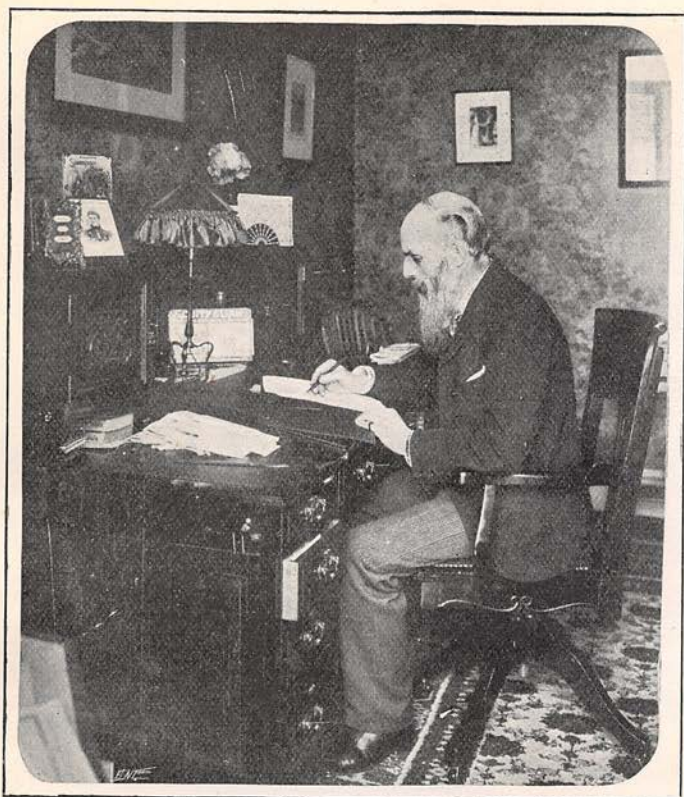
"I did not," replied Mr. Crockett to the



Photo]

REV. S. R. CROCKETT,
Author of "The Raiders."

[*Moffat.*



Photo]

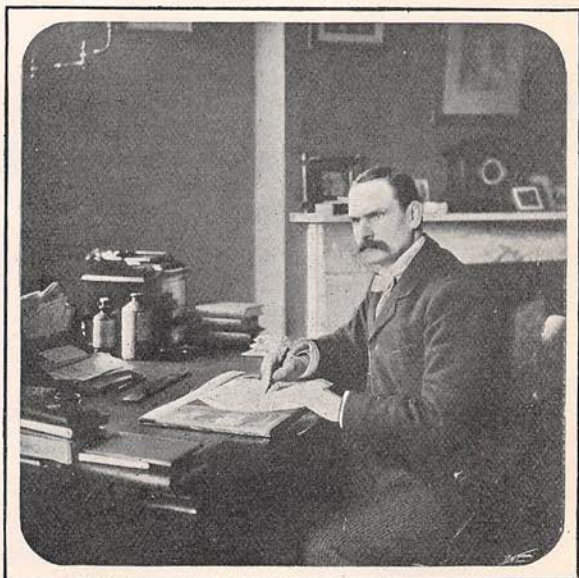
REV. SILAS K. HOCKING,
The most prolific clerical novelist

[Geo. Newnes, Ltd.

much for them as ever—or perhaps more. I only resigned because I felt that others could do the pastoral work better than I could, while my own work of writing had been thrust upon me almost against my will." It is interesting to learn that Mr. Crockett makes use of the camera in writing descriptions of scenery and local colour. In many cases his descriptions are "written up" from photographs taken when holiday-making.

It is a singular coincidence to find two brothers both of whom have occupied the pulpit and used the pen. Silas and Joseph Hocking have achieved reputations as novelists as well as preachers, though until comparatively recently, Silas Hocking's work was practically unknown in the south of England. You could go into a bookseller's shop in the West End of London and ask for a novel by

writer, "become an author. I had authorship thrust upon me. I had been a journalist from my early youth and had written for all sorts of papers. I entered the Church under a definite impulse, and because I desired to work among poor people. I soon became the minister of a large working-class congregation, but I never gave up my old literary leanings. A series of articles in a religious journal attracted considerable attention, and soon afterwards I had offers from half a dozen publishers, and from that date I have gone on writing steadily. I found, however, that though my heart was as much with the people as ever, I could not do justice to the heavy detail work of visiting, preaching and evening meetings. I therefore resigned seven years ago, but have ever since remained among my old congregation, and am able, I think, to do as



Photo]

REV. JOSEPH HOCKING,
Author of "All Men are Liars."

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Photo] DEAN FARRAR, [Elliott and Fry.
Author of "Eric, or, Little by Little"

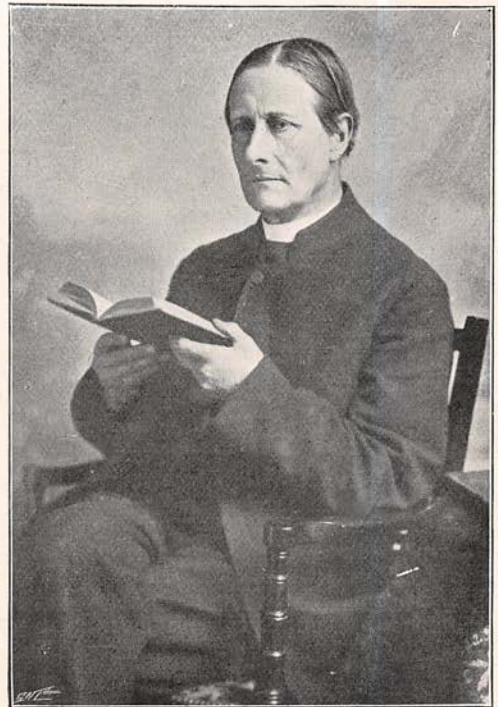
Silas K. Hocking and the assistant would stare at you in amazement; while in Lancashire his stories were selling by the million, and so great is the demand for them in the north that they can be bought in the most unexpected places—even greengrocers storing them on the shelves along with their familiar rows of vinegar bottles. The Rev. Silas Hocking has been the novelist to whom the mill and factory hand has gone to seek relief from what, under the happiest circumstances, is apt to be a monotonous existence. Since the accounts of the enormous sales of his books have been noised abroad Mr. Hocking's novels have gained for him a greater audience than ever, particularly in London and the south.

"As to what induced me to become a novelist I really don't know," replied Mr. Silas Hocking, "I simply yielded to an inward compulsion, and as my first story was accepted, the scribbling fever grew, and I discovered that I had more stories to tell." His brother, Mr. Joseph Hocking, says, "I took to writing just as a duck takes to swimming."

It speaks volumes for Dean Farrar's powers as a story writer, that his books for boys,

particularly *Eric, or, Little by Little*, are still so popular, despite their sadness; for there is no denying that they are among the saddest school stories ever written, which makes their popularity among schoolboys all the more surprising. Dean Farrar recently remarked, "I do not aspire to be called a novelist. I wrote my earlier stories simply to help and interest boys in their home and school lives. My later stories, *Darkness and Dawn* and *Gathering Clouds*, were written to illustrate the dawn and commencing decadences of Christianity."

The Rev. S. Baring Gould is at once the most prolific and versatile of clerical writers. The mere fact of his being the author of that famous hymn, "Onward, Christian Soldiers," would be alone sufficient to entitle him to distinction, and one has but to read through a list of his works to gain some idea of the wide range of his knowledge. He has the longest list of publications after his name of any one in *Who's Who*. His industry is surprising, in fact it is said he is never happy unless doing something. Last year his health broke down and he was ordered away from his pretty rectory at Lew Trenchard in Devonshire to spend a month or two in Brittany.



Photo] REV. S. BARING GOULD, [Elliott and Fry.
The most prolific clerical author.



REV. CHARLES W. GORDON (RALPH CONNOR),
Author of "The Sky Pilot."

Not many weeks afterwards a delightful volume appeared under his name on the historic country to which the doctor had sent him for a rest.

The latest notable recruit to the ranks of clerical novelists is the Rev. Charles W. Gordon, who writes under the name of "Ralph Connor." His church and sphere of work are situated far away in Winnipeg in Canada, but his stories, especially *The Sky Pilot* and *The Black Rock*, dealing with life among the miners and lumbermen in the Rocky Mountains, where he was for

several years a missionary, have gained for him many admirers on this side of the Atlantic as well as in the dominion. Like Dr. Watson he still continues his pastoral work.

Though story writing only forms a small portion of the Rev. W. J. Dawson's literary work, his novels, *The Story of Hannah*, *The House of Dreams*, *Through Lattice Windows*, and others, have proved that both as novelist and preacher he is a man to be reckoned with. Before he became minister of Highbury Quadrant Congregational Church, in 1892, he was a Wesleyan minister.

The Rev. E. J. Hardy, the noted army chaplain, though he can scarcely be termed a novelist, has written many amusing and entertaining books. Mr. Hardy scored his first great success by his book, *How to be Happy though Married*. He experienced much difficulty in finding a publisher, but its marvellous sale has made more than one publisher regret his lost opportunity.

There are many clergymen and ministers who write short stories, and it is possible that amongst them are some whose names will one day be famous. The Rev. Victor Lorenzo Whitechurch and the Rev. S. N. Sedgwick are two young curates whose literary work has already met with considerable success. Mr. Sedgwick's stories are, of course, well known to our readers, and his *Tales of the Early Christians* is shortly to be published in book form by our firm.



Photo]

REV. W. J. DAWSON,
Author of "The Story of Hannah."

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