His Dead Past. By C. J. Wills. (Chatto & Windus.)

IN many respects this is the most pleasing of Mr. C. J. Wills's numerous novels. The style of writing is easy and simple throughout; there are several dramatic and well-managed situations; and two of the characters (Woffles, "our leading tragedian," and Col. Finch, the club whist-player) are interesting. The title of the book refers to a young man who, while still at the "army-crammer's" establishment, marries the *protégée* of Woffles. The lady is disappointed to find her husband is poor and without prospects, and they willingly separate. Subsequent events cause the hero, Frank Tradescant, to regret these proceedings. We do not know if the writing of the book and its publication occurred without more than the usual interval of time. Mr. Wills's chronology is difficult to follow in any case. In one place he says his history deals "with events which occurred twenty years ago"; and there is a subsequent interval of thirteen years and more. Yet the hero at the age of sixteen drives in a carriage with rubber tyres, and speaks of a reigning emperor "who was sure to avenge Waterloo sooner or later." The book can be read by young and old with equal pleasure.

Dracula. By Bram Stoker. (Constable & Co.)

STORIES and novels appear just now in plenty stamped with a more or less genuine air of belief in the visibility of supernatural agency. The strengthening of a bygone faith in the fantastic and magical view of things in lieu of the purely material is a feature of the hour, a reaction—artificial, perhaps, rather than natural—against late tendencies in thought. Mr. Stoker is the purveyor of so many strange wares that 'Dracula' reads like a determined effort to go, as it were, "one better" than others in the same field. How far the author is himself a believer in the phenomena described is not for the reviewer to say. He can but attempt to gauge how far the general faith in witches, warlocks, and vampires—supposing it to exist in any general and appreciable measure—is likely to be stimulated by this story. The vampire idea is very ancient indeed, and there are in nature, no doubt, mysterious powers to account for the vague belief in such beings. Mr. Stoker's way of presenting his matter, and still more the matter itself, are of too direct and uncompromising a kind. They lack the essential note of awful remoteness and at the same time subtle affinity that separates while it links our humanity with unknown beings and possibilities hovering on the confines of the known world. 'Dracula' is highly sensational, but it is wanting in the constructive art as well as in the higher literary sense. It reads at times like a mere series of grotesquely incredible events; but there are better moments that show more power, though even these are never productive of the tremor such subjects evoke under the hand of a master. An immense amount of energy, a certain degree of imaginative faculty, and many ingenious and gruesome details are there. At times Mr. Stoker almost succeeds in creating the sense of possibility in impossibility; at others he merely commands an array of crude statements of incredible actions. The early part goes best, for it promises to unfold the roots of mystery and fear lying deep in human nature; but the want of skill and fancy grows more and more conspicuous. The people who band themselves together to run the vampire to earth have no real individuality or being. The German man of science is particularly poor, and indulges, like a German, in much weak sentiment. Still Mr. Stoker has got together a number of "horrid details," and his object, assuming it to be ghastliness, is fairly well fulfilled. Isolated scenes and touches are probably quite uncanny enough to please those for whom they are designed.

A Troth of Tears. By Clement A. Mendham. (Digby, Long & Co.)

'A TROTH OF TEARS' contains a large measure of all the faults of which a novel is capable. It is difficult to read the book with patience. Two consecutive sentences, selected almost at random, read thus:—

"An unaccountable determination had seized him to confront Sir Richard, which may probably be accounted for by the fact of the effect which the shocks of his former life had left. A strange excitability, which had aroused into action the lingering consequences of his dreadful illness, was upon him."

The writer's meaning sometimes appears dimly through his words, but it more often happens that he is unintelligible. The scenes on board ship are a travesty of nautical life.

Le Curé de Favières. Par Georges Ohnet. (Paris, Ollendorff.)

WE suppose that in these democratic days respect is due from us to the novelist who has the largest circulation in the world, and that there can be no doubt that M. Georges Ohnet's 'Le Maître de Forges' enjoyed a larger sale than any other novel of our times. In his new book M. Ohnet lies open to all the attacks of "Gyp" and his other literary enemies. Nothing can be feebler than the construction of the book, and its interest to us is slight. We have not taken in the past the same unfavourable view of some of M. Ohnet's books which has generally been that of the critics, and we have detected in them some of the qualities which the public seem to have found; but we cannot think that he is keeping up to even that level which he had previously attained.

A Satirycall Dialogve, or a Sharplye-Invectiue Conference betweene Allexander the Great and that truely Woman-hater Diogynes. [By William Goddard.] Imprinted in the Lowcountryes [? Dort ? 1615] for all such Gentlewomen as are not altogeather Idle nor yet well Ocvpyed. Edited by John S. Farmer. (Privately printed.)

Two other works of Goddard are extant, viz., 'A Neaste of Wasps' and 'A Mastif Whelp,' two copies of the former and one of the latter having survived the ravages of Time, who happily does not confine his rapacity to what is purely excellent and essentially precious. Of the work now before us only one copy is known to exist—that in the British Museum. So Goddard's productions have all narrowly escaped extinction. And it cannot be maintained that the loss to literature would have been very serious had they not done so—had they all been extinguished. But yet they have their value. In respect of both their language and their ideas they are of some service in illustrating an age that can never be too much illustrated—the age of Shakspeare and Bacon.

Goddard is one of the minor—or the *minim?*—satirists of the time. The best satirical spirit expressed itself in the favourite literary form of the age—in the dramatic form; but even then Juvenal had his followers, and in Donne and Marston we have the crude beginnings of the style that reached its perfection in the hands of Dryden and of Pope. Satire was in the air, so to speak, at the close of the sixteenth century. There is a passage in Shakspeare's 'As You Like It' of great interest in this connexion. "The melancholy Jaques" confesses to a passionate longing to be a satirist—to criticize and abuse society with all the freedom of an "allowed fool":—

I am ambitious for a motley coat.....
I must have liberty
Withal, as large a charter as the wind,
To blow on whom I please.....
Invest me in my motley. Give me leave
To speak my mind, and I will through and through
Cleanse the foul body of the infected world,
If they will patiently receive my medicine.

But the duke makes short work of all his profession of a moral purpose, and when he asks,

What for a counter would I do but good?

answers peremptorily,

Most mischievous foul sin in chiding sin;
For thou thyself hast been a libertine
As sensual as the brutish sting itself;
And all the embossed sores and headed evils,
That thou with licence of free foqt hast caught,
Wouldst thou disgorge into the general world.

Evidently the duke—perhaps we may venture to say Shakspeare himself—is altogether impatient of those gentlemen who, forgetful of their own shortcomings, assume the right to lash everybody else—to "chide" every "breather in the world but" themselves, "against whom," if they were wise, they would "know most faults." Often enough the satirist deserves to be scourged quite as much as any one of his victims, or even more. It is an act of amazing self-confidence to take upon oneself the office of social censor and judge. And Jaques's aspirations in this line are very severely rebuked.

But Goddard, who without any of Jaques's wit yet so aspires, had, unhappily for himself, no good duke to repress him, and one of the results is this misogynical piece now reprinted. Of course he assures us that his intentions are good. He informs "the senseless Censurer" that

Wholly this book was made folly to show.

To be sure, its talk is in parts very gross; but

Pack hence, precision. Cry'st it is obsceane?

—as, indeed, a person not at all prudish might very justly cry—

Dive deeper, shallow pate. Know what I mean.

Clearly Goddard is far from easy in his mind as to what respectable readers will think of his verses:—

What for a counter would he do but good?