THE STEPMOTHER. A tale of Modern Athens. By Gregory Xenopoulos. Done into English by Mrs. Edmonds. 2s. 6d. (Lane.)

That a delicate subject is handled in a delicate manner in this Greek story of to-day, is what had best be kept prominent in a judgment of the book. A father and son are rivals for the love of a beautiful young woman. The father, a gay, good-natured, charming, not very observant person, marries her, and never discovers his son's misery. The son, in the end, behaves like an honourable man. Mrs. Edmonds, by writing a preface in which she seems to treat this very slight story as capable of vividly presenting domestic life in Athens among the comfortable classes, has attached to it too much responsibility. But so, too, does its author, whose chief purpose was to show the evils of early marriage. That a grown-up son may fall in love with his step-mother is a possible consequence of his father marrying, for the first time, too young; but the evil might be attacked on several stronger grounds.

DRACULA. By Bram Stoker. 6s. (A. Constable.)

Since Wilkie Collins left us we have had no tale of mystery so liberal in matter and so closely woven. But with the intricate plot, and the methods of the narrative, the resemblance to stories of the author of "The Woman in White" ceases; for the audacity and the horror of "Dracula" are Mr. Stoker's own. A summary of the book would shock and disgust; but we must own that, though here and there in the course of the tale we hurried over things with repulsion, we read nearly the whole with rapt attention. It is something of a triumph for the writer that neither the improbability, nor the unnecessary number of hideous incidents recounted of the man-vampire, are long foremost in the reader's mind, but that the interest of the danger, of the complications, of the pursuit of the villain, of human skill and courage pitted against inhuman wrong and superhuman strength, rises always to the top. Keep "Dracula" out of the way of nervous children, certainly; but a grown reader, unless he be of unserviceably delicate stuff, will both shudder and enjoy from p. 35, when Harker sees the Count "emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, *face down*, with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings."

THE CHEVALIER D'AURIAC. By S. Levett Yeats. 3s. 6d. (Longmans.)

This is unquestionably the best cloak-and-sword story that the past few months have produced; and every month sends out a score or so of passable things of the kind. Of course, it is made according to the well-known receipt. There is the impecunious noble lord, young, valiant, and hard beset by misfortune till the fifth act; there is the beautiful and spirited and yet most feminine heroine; there is the faithful squire; and there are the swaggering bully and the intriguers that keep the hero so long from the favour of a magnificently generous king. All common stuff enough; but woven here with skill and lightness, and making a fabric glancing with cheerful light. Mr. Levett Yeats takes no pains to keep present-day colloquialisms out of a tale of old France; but what of that, since he can tell a story?

THE LADY GRANGE. By A. Innes Shand. 6s. (Smith, Elder).

Victim of the infamous Simon Fraser and of her own husband, Lady Grange has been the subject of much curiosity, of many theories, of hot partisanship and abuse. Mr. Shand gives one version of the notorious abduction, the motives for it, and its consequences—a cool, sane version, which suggests the historical student rather than the romance writer. As a novel his book is not imaginative, hardly attractive, but it has stuff in it, some excellent judgment, good writing of a dry, austere kind, and abundant material from which a reader with some vividness of fancy and constructiveness of mind can easily build up a picture of the stormy times in Scotland after the '45.

WHILE THE BILLY BOILS. By Henry Lawson. (Simpkin.)

Australia sends us too much dull fiction; but Mr. Lawson is no culprit. These stories, sketches, and talks extracted from Sydney and other colonial papers, are brief, strong, business-like, and vivid pictures of camp-life and character. Existence out there isn't all beer and skittles, we gather. Mr. Lawson speaks of toil, poverty, sordidness, and sin as familiarly as does any writer of the old country. It is not a romantic, it is indeed a rough, commonplace life he tells of. But there is a light shining over his experiences—the light of good comradeship. The stories, clever, energetic, and kindly, have some of the best qualities of Bret Harte's earlier manner.

IN THE CRUCIBLE. By Grace Denis Litchfield. 6s. (Putnam.)

Here our old friend, the Sunday-school story, is sublimated almost into a real novel. But it carries the stamp of its origin into its more dignified state. There is the good young man, and there is the bad young man, both in love with the same beautiful young woman. The good young man is blamed for causing the death of a friend, while the bad young man is, of course, the culprit. Whereupon, the young woman, who had bestowed her affections with discretion, turns round and gives her hand to the bad young man, and only discovers his treachery too late. The good young man goes off to drown his sorrows in Art, and the young woman sets about the reform of her husband. He needs more reforming than she dreams of at first, and hers would have been a long task had he not died—in an exemplarily violent fashion. Whereupon the good young man comes into his reward. For sensation there is an earthquake; and to give the novel flavour, there is a series of ambitious, but rather lifeless, society portraits in Washington, U.S.A. Yet stript of its fine company features, it might have had, with the recommendation of the squire's lady, a successful career among village Marys and Susans.

THE PAPER BOAT. By Palinurus. 3s. 6d. (Bowden.)

"The Paper Boat" is holiday fiction, and to be enjoyed at all must be read within sight of masts and within sound of the sea. Indeed yachtsmen are its proper audience, for all the good stuff in it deals with their interests and adventures. "My First Big Race" contains an exciting narrative of the contest between two crack cutters, and "The Voyage of the *Florette*" has points which a helmsmen only can appreciate. But the story in the latter, and in others too, suggests that it was clumsily invented to give an excuse for talking of boats. As stories they are all poor, of an unattractive old-fashion in tone and mechanism, and one at least, "The Telephone Incident," utterly commonplace, and with nothing about any kind of craft in it, has obviously been thrust in to make up bulk.

FALSE GODS. By Mrs. Albert Bradshaw. 6s. (Henry.)

This is a story to make one interested not in itself but in the writer's experience of human nature. Some of it is certainly derived from old melodrama; the rest is inexplicable. Mrs. Bradshaw's aim was to depict a woman who loved money and fine clothes and luxury more than anything else. So far all right; there are such. But her history is the clumsiest invention. She is married and has one child (whom she loves, by the way), when an advertisement warns her she is heir to a fortune. On inquiry she finds she can enjoy the fortune on condition of having no encumbrances. Without consulting anyone, she casts off the encumbrances, and presents herself as an unmarried woman. For years she makes no sign to her husband. This colossal coolness is hard enough to swallow; and it is followed up, of course, by a worn-out device of introducing the husband unknowingly as secretary into the household of which she is a member. Confronted with him, she has the audacity to say, "I did it all for you! One day I should be free, and then you would profit." But she still keeps up the game, till the husband has had time to die of a broken heart, and a fine gentleman comes by who says, "Yes, I know she is a bad lot, but then, you see, I love her for herself." Everything is false or incapable in the book, the sentiment, the seriousness, the course of events, the travesty of human nature.

A STORY-TELLER'S PACK. By Frank R. Stockton. 6s. (Cassell.)

Let every seaside library buy dozens of copies of Mr. Stockton's "Pack." No pedlar is likely to come round