

Reviews of Books.

THE OLD MUNSTER CIRCUIT. By Maurice Healy, K.C., Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 10s. 6d.

Eheu fugaces : When one reads a book bearing the title of "The Old Munster Circuit," concerning people many of whom were one's own contemporaries and who are now gone to their last rest, one becomes vividly conscious of the passage of the years. The history of the Munster Circuit from Elizabethan times to the last decade of the nineteenth century has already been written, but Mr. Healy's book only concerns itself with the remarkable and often amusing personalities that figured on the Circuit from the beginning of our present century when his own memory became active. Let us say at once that he has given us the best book of legal reminiscences that has ever been written in Ireland. Most of these books contain a collection of stories, very often feebly or wrongly told, without any real attempt to depict the characters of the men of brilliant wit who conceived them, or the circumstances which inspired them. Mr. Healy, who is widely known as one of the best *raconteurs* of our time, has more than the usual quota of good stories, and he never fails to do them full justice in the telling. One admires often the skill which enables him to relate without offence stories which possess both point and piquancy owing to their Rabelaisian flavour. Mr. Healy also possesses a fine gift of character drawing and one can witness to the authenticity of his portraits, and he writes in an easy flowing style that reminds one of the best talk. He makes his figures live, and past years and events rise up again before one. Save in one or two instances when, probably, family traditions have given him an undue bias, Mr. Healy treats the figures of the past in the kindest spirit and scarcely ever steeps his pen in the gall of bitterness.

Limerick and Clare contributed their full share to the celebrities of the circuit, and Mr. Healy's description of some of them are amongst the best character sketches in the book. Here is "Pether the Packer" drawn to life, complete with his lisp and rather childish vanity, and arrayed in all his glory as Lord Chief Justice—the position he had won by his undoubted abilities, and his readiness to order jurymen "to stand aside," and to perform other services for the Castle in the days of the Land War. Peace be to his ashes for he, too, had his good points and always had a soft spot in his heart for any delinquent that came before him from the Banner County. Paddy Fleming, from Kilfinane, provides the material for amusing stories before he retired from the Circuit to become County Court Judge in Westmeath and Longford. To his excellence in this capacity Mr. Healy pays a deserved tribute, and the writer of this review who practised before him can endorse his words. Then there is Paddy Kelly, of Ardagh, who was probably the wittiest Irishman of his time, and whose sayings and droll stories were enhanced by the strong and pronounced brogue of his native county. There is also Paddy Lynch, until a few weeks ago Attorney-General of Eire, still with us and going strong. Irish people will not forget how, during a troublous time in their history when advocacy of the popular cause was neither fashionable nor profitable amongst the members of the circuit, he was neither seduced by hopes of office nor deterred by undoubted risks from raising his voice as their advocate. Ability and wit were not confined to Barristers, and there is frequent mention of Solicitors who practised on the circuit. Amongst these Mr. Moran, uncle to the present County Registrar, deservedly occupies a prominent place in Mr. Healy's pages.

We could run on for a long time about the book, which is charming in style and matter, but the extent of space allowed to a reviewer imposes a limit. We can only express the hope that Mr. Healy, having made his debut so auspiciously as a man of letters, will on some future occasion again leave the dusty purlieus of the law for a time to stray in the more pleasant fields of literature. The deserved success of this book justifies the highest hopes of him as a writer, and it is only because he has also won high distinction as an advocate that one hesitates to say he would find a literary career his proper and most fitting vocation.

J. M. F.