

"THE BOOKMAN" GALLERY.

STANLEY PORTAL HYATT.

MR. STANLEY PORTAL HYATT is not a literary man. It is the first thing about himself that he will tell you. By turns he has been engineer, sheep station hand, nigger driver, hunter, trader, transport rider, labour agent, explorer, lecturer, pressman, American soldier, blockade runner, and tramp; and along such various and unusual ways he has drifted on the tide of circumstances into the ranks of professional bookmen.

He was born in 1877, and educated at Dulwich College. He left school early, spent two years in the workshops of a big firm of electrical engineers, and then the wander-thirst gripped him. Before his eighteenth birthday he watched, from the fo'cs'le of a windjammer, the silver crescent of the moon rising above Sydney Heads. He spent a fortnight in the New South Wales capital, which abounded then not only in larrikins but in fan-tan shops, where all day one heard "those gruesome, horrible claws," the long nails of the Chinese croupier, scratching over the matting as he raked in the lost money, or watched the concentrated spite on his face as he paid out to an unusually successful gambler. Thereafter Mr. Hyatt got a berth in a big sheep station some four hundred miles up-country. It was a magnificent place, splendidly maintained and splendidly stocked, but even so far from the coast he found little suggestion of the back-blocks, and no hint at all of the Australia of the novelist. He was not sorry to cut loose and drift down again to Sydney, even though he reached the coast with two pounds in his pocket and but a meagre chance of earning more. A fortnight of loafing varied by daily visits to the cheapest of cheap eating-houses saw the end of his capital, whereupon his first dress suit, pride of its owner's heart, passed into the hands of a little Jew in Argyll Street for a recompense of ten shillings. Then his luck turned, and somebody gave him an engineering job of sorts. Even that filtered out ere long, and our young emigrant, not yet nineteen, cabled home for money, and shook the dust of Australia from his shoes in digst.

Mr. Hyatt was to spend eighteen months at home, a period devoted mainly to a newly acquired craze for inventing things. By the end of that time the nation was the richer to the extent of protection fees on five epoch-making inventions, to the value of which it displayed an utterly callous indifference. These

included a camera, a bicycle brake, a steam engine valve, an arrangement for glazing the windows of railway carriages, and, lastly, a paraffin lamp that could be used with the incandescent mantle. He and one of his brothers worked on that together, and they had a company promoter ready to float it—when it was ready. They grew quite used to fires during the experiments. They kept a box of sand at the end of the bench, and every time the lamp burst this would be emptied over the blaze. There was no denying that the apparatus worked. When the atmospheric conditions were right, or when the thing was in a good

humour, the light would be far brighter than that obtainable from coal gas; but at other times it poured out volumes of thick, black smoke, or, in default, blew the mantle to pieces. They never succeeded in getting an automatic adjustment, and ultimately lost about a hundred pounds over the scheme.

Then Mr. Hyatt and his brother signed contracts to go out to Matabeleland for two years. The end of the second Matabele War was practically in sight, the dawn of prosperity seemed to be coming, and the country was being opened up in earnest. The Geelong mine, whose staff the two brothers were to join, was to be the first mine in Rhodesia actually to produce gold. After initial hardships enough to have sent the average raw youth homing back to the flesh-pots of civilisation without loss of time, they reached

the mine itself. The difficulties before them were infinitely worse. I must leave those who require a detailed exposition of them to the vivid pages of "A Soldier of Fortune." Here is just one picture:

"We were told to start at dawn, and to follow a cart spoor to the Tuli, where we were to await the waggons. No white man ever carries a pack in Africa, even a seasoned old prospector will not try it, yet we had to take rifles, blankets, food, and water—and we had been little more than three weeks on the veld. Moreover, there were no water bags, and we had to be content with vulcanite bottles holding a pint each. We, my brother and myself, got on about five miles without a drink; then we opened his water bottle, to find that, whilst it had been hanging on the back rail of the waggon, some one had stolen half its contents. We got along another five miles fairly well; but the weight of our packs and rifles, and the heavy sand underfoot, was telling. It was about ten o'clock then,



Photo by Elliott & Fry.

Mr. Stanley Portal Hyatt.