THE SECOND "YELLOW BOOK."*

If the editors of the Yellow Book were not so wantonly anxious to be new and aggressive they would make a better product of their venture. Though the second number is an improvement upon the first, there lies upon it still the original taint of the idea which gave the quarterly birth. The editors seem to face the public and the world of letters with a grinning complacency in their own boldness. And yet theirs is the audacity rather of indiscretion than of conviction. They would seem not so much to know when they have found a new thing which is good as to believe that they have found a good thing because it is new. All new movements harbour within the pages of the Yellow Book, which is like to take them a greater reputation for hospitality than for taste or judgment. The sooner the editors begin weeding the better for both the art and literature of the volume. It is a mistake to be too generous, and a greater mistake to be too enthusiastic. To indulge with kindness the errors of the heady young is very different from slapping them into ruthless print, and displaying them in shop windows as literature and art.

The editors need a touch of distrust in human nature. A woman with a strange name or a man with a new mode is not necessarily a genius. These remarks, we admit, do not apply so seriously to this number as to the last. But considering the pretensions of the publication and its reputed sale, there is far too much for yawns in the book. Mr. Beardsley's cover is certainly better than his last, though the colour is as raw and rank as ever; but of his numerous drawings within we hesitate to write lest our pen carry our distaste into extreme language. There is none to deny the skill of the arrangements in black and white masses, but the trick—for it is nothing more—palls upon the eye; while no economy of line or dexterity of sweep can compensate for the corrupt suggestion which the artist embodies in his human figures. Among the best pieces in the book are Mr. Alfred Thornton's quiet landscape, which, though reminiscent of Corot and others, has a manner of its own, and clever studies by Mr. Steer, Mr. W. Sickert, and Mr. Hartrick. Why Mr. Steer calls a picture of his own legs and that of a young lady's a "Portait of himself" is beyond us, but it is good for all that, as is Mr. Sullivan's "The Quick and the Dead."

We can commend Mr. Henry James's story, "The Coxon Feud" for extreme and dexterous reserve; but it is surely a trifle dull and over long. Mr. Greenwood contributes a gentle memory, which reminds one that he once wrote a novel, and has not forgotten the art of narrative. With the exception of a tale by Ella D'Arcy, which shows some qualities of originality, the other short stories call for little notice. Mr. Harland's "A Responsibility" is in the vein of Mr. James, but lacks the subtlety of that ingenious and elusive writer. Mr. Kenneth Graham's sketch is characterized by the feeling which may be noted in all his work, and is distinctly humorous withal. There is no particular reason for the intrusion of Mr. Max Beerbohm's defence, which stands at about the level of his original article. Mr. Hamerton contributes an honest but singularly colourless criticism of the first number of the Yellow Book; and Mr. Hubert Crackanthorpe writes discursively and automatically of "Reticence in Literature." The verse is sadly lacking, despite the poetastic names that underwrite it.

* "The Yellow Book." Vol. II. (Elkin Mathews and John Lane.)