

easily satisfy themselves by turning to the three reviews that appeared in *The Times*, *The Chronicle*, and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, on April 4th, the same day that "Marcella" was published for the benefit of the general reader. The unanimous interest excited by its publication was proved by the fact that by the end of ten days there was hardly a newspaper in the United Kingdom that had not criticised it. This haste to review was doubtless a great testimony to the interest aroused by Mrs. Ward's writings; but it is a matter of conjecture how it is possible to review adequately a novel, which has taken its learned authoress two years to write, and which is so evidently the outcome of most serious and anxious thought, when the average reviewer can only have received his copy two, or at most four, days before the date of the publication of his criticism.

So much has been written already that I shall confine my criticism in these pages to a consideration of the character of the heroine, leaving to more able pens than mine the task of discussing the many deeply interesting and thrilling political problems that it deals with. At the same time, I must own that many of the long and learned reviews that have appeared seem to me not to have grasped the central point of human interest in the novel which, to my thinking, is the deep spirituality, and, at the same time, the vivid naturalness of its principal character. I cannot hope to do more than record feebly the strong impression that the book has made upon myself, in the hopes of inducing our readers to obtain it, at their very earliest convenience, in order that they may be able to judge for themselves, for "Marcella" is a noble book, and I think that it really is a much greater novel than either "David Grieve" or "Robert Elsmere," for in those books, as the central point of interest was the development of a man's character, the critical faculties were constantly aroused; and over and over again, in spite of much powerful and vigorous writing, the judgment whispered detracting verdicts, such as, "A man would not feel or act just like that," or, "this is a great and good woman's conception of what a man would think, and do, and suffer"; but it wants actuality—for it lacks just the genius of intuition—for counting that a man has, say, ten sides to his character, a woman that is a spiritual and good woman, probably, can see and judge of only those sides of his character that are known to her, and that are more or less turned towards herself; and if an authoress endeavours to describe what a man thinks or feels when he is fighting and struggling with the demons of doubt, she will, probably, only succeed in describing the way which she would struggle and suffer herself. But enough of these arguments—the only object of which is to try and point out that, in "Marcella," Mrs. Humphrey Ward is at her very best. Marcella's character being nature itself, and a noble nature, she engages our interest from the first. Here is a graphic description of her character:—

"Marcella's emotions were real, but her mind seldom deserted her. One half of her was impulsive and passionate; the other half looked on and put in finishing touches."

The poor people who live in the neglected village

tenements, which Mr. Boyce, Marcella's father, inherits, are described with great vitality. Mrs. Jellison is simply alive whenever she speaks, and the trusting manner with which she clings to the middleman, Jimmy Gedge, and refuses to join the new Straw Plaiting Union, which Marcella and her friend Lady Winterbourne wished to introduce into the village, is one of the very best things in the book, and some of her shrewd sayings might even rank with those of the immortal Mrs. Poyser. Here is one that is worth quoting as an example.

"Well, I've never found you get forrader wi' snarlin' over what you can't help. And there's mercies, when you've had a husband in his bed for fower year, Miss, and he 'o took at last you'll know. . . . Fower year—an' fire upstairs, an' fire downstairs, an' fire all night, an' soom-thin allus wanted. An' he such an objeck afore he died! It do seem like a holiday now to sit a bit."

Marcella is a socialist in ideas, but without any personal experience of the poor; she is an enthusiast and will give no half measure in her sympathy. I purposely avoid dwelling on the political problems that are treated with such profound knowledge in these pages. I have preferred to deal with the deep human interest in the book, which must, and will, appeal to all classes of readers, though I must frankly own that several chapters in the novel read to me more like an abstruse political pamphlet, which retards the action of the story, and are too learned for average readers, and will rather detract from, than enhance, the interest of the novel in their eyes. After Marcella herself, the character and personality of "Wharton" is the most vigorously described in the book. He is not the hero, but, alas! he is much more interesting than the hero, and it is easy to understand why Marcella found him (for a time at any rate) so much more attractive. An interview that takes place between Wharton, and Marcella is such a good example of Mrs. Humphrey Ward's art that it deserves quotation. Wharton speaks:—

"And there, as I said before, I have no gift!—I have not a relation or an old friend in the world that has not turned his back upon me—as you might see for yourself yesterday! My class has renounced me already—which, after all, is a weakness.' 'So you pity yourself?' she said, 'By no means! We all choose the part in life that amuses us—that bring us most thrill. I get most thrill out of throwing myself into the workmen's war—much more than I could ever get, you will admit, out of dancing attendance on my very respectable cousins. My mother taught me to see everything dramatically. We have no drama in England at the present moment worth a cent, so I amuse myself with this great tragi-comedy of the working-class movement. It stirs, pricks, interests me from morning till night. I feel the great rough elemental passions in it, and it delights me to know that every day brings us nearer to some great outburst, to scenes and struggles at any rate that will make us all look alive. I am like a child with the best of its cake to come, but with plenty in hand already.'"

And yet so great was the glamour surrounding Wharton's attractive personality that Marcella was not in the least disillusioned by this frank avowal. It was a masterstroke upon Wharton's part, and the description of it seems to me a masterpiece of literary art.

Next week I shall hope to finish this review, as the book is too important a one to discuss in one short notice.

A. M. G.

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