

A Book of the Week.

"THE QUEST OF THE GOLDEN GIRL."*

A BEWILDERING book, this, to try and criticise! The author gives us to understand from the first that it is a fantasia, that here we are to expect no realism, no attention to probabilities, no shackles of any kind. He mounts the steed of his fancy, and forthwith it flies into the air with him.

Through the green heart of Surrey he wanders, and the journey is told with the sweet grace of a poet who is writing prose, or something as near prose as he can get, for, truth to tell, it is sometimes wonderfully poetic, as in the exquisite account of his vision, or the still lovelier rapture about spring.

"A mad piper, indeed, this Spring, with his wonderful lying music—ever lying, yet ever convincing, for when was Spring known to keep his word? Yet year after year we give eager belief to his promises. He may have consistently broken them for fifty years, yet this year he will keep them. This year the dream will come true, the ship come home. This year the very dead we have loved shall come back to us again, for Spring can even lie like that. There is nothing he will not promise the poor, hungry human heart, with his innocent-looking daisies, and those practised liars the birds. Why, one branch of hawthorn against the sky promises more than all the summers of time can pay!"

Nothing could be more perfect than that.

Nothing, also, more charming than the little incidents of his travel—the interrupted wedding, the meeting with Alastor, the gipsy boy with his top, the old man who was building his own house. Everything is touched with the hand of one who loves the world, and who has seen much in what William Watson calls the "mysterious heart of common things." In a fantasia one can also pardon the episode of Nicolette, though the night scene at the inn might almost rival the celebrated champagne scene in "Little Eyolf."

But we find it hard, even in a fairy tale, that the fairy prince who roams through the pages seeking the "Golden Girl," the woman of his dreams, should so often turn aside on the way after such very poor imitations. What would Mrs. Sarah Grand say to a hero who amuses himself with an inn chambermaid, and a little dancer whom he takes to Paris? Probably she would say that, in view of the woman he ultimately marries, there is nothing to complain of; so much has to be overlooked on both sides that there is no injustice. Yet to the old-fashioned, who are foolish enough to cling to Coventry Patmore's outworn dictum that "Life is sweetest when it's clean," it seems a little disappointing that the hero who starts out so bravely in search of whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are pure, should at last find his happiness lurking in a doorway in Piccadilly in the small hours of the morning.

However, after all, this, we shall be told, is a matter of taste, and we must not demand morals in a fantasia.

The episode of Rosalind and her punctured "bike" is very prettily told—the little charming person breaking down so lamentably in her rôle of New Woman, and unable to enjoy her holiday without her husband.

* "The Quest of the Golden Girl," by Richard Le Gallienne. (John Lane, The Bodley Head.)

This plea against the growing desire to scorn the old-fashioned idea of a wedding is too charming to go unquoted:

"Surely they can spare a little of their happiness, just one day's sight of it, to a less happy world—a world long since married and done for, and with little happiness in it save the sight of other people's happiness. It is good for us to see happy people, good for the symbols of happiness to be carried high among us on occasion; for, if they serve no other purpose, they inspire in us the hope that we, too, may some day be happy, or remind our discontented hearts that we have been."

G. M. R.

Bookland.

WHAT TO READ.

- "Sun and Mist," poems by E. St. G. Betts.
- "The Empire of the Tsars and the Russians," by A. Leroy-Beaulieu.
- "In the Bight of Benin: Stories from the West African Coast," by A. J. Dawson.
- "Romantic India," by André Chevrillon.
- "Among Pagodas and Fair Ladies: being an Account of a Tour through Burma," by Gwendolen Trench Gascoigne. With a Prefatory Note by Donald Smeaton, C.S.I., Financial Commissioner for Burma.
- "A Village Politician: the Life-Story of John Buckley," edited by J. C. Buckmaster.
- "Christine of the Hills," by Max Pemberton.
- "The Man of Straw," by Edwin Pugh.

"Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland," by Olive Schreiner, is a terrible indictment against the so-called civilisation of the African tribes by the British. As literature it is magnificent—so strong and pure—it is joy—that this book has been written by a woman.

Coming Events.

February 26th.—Third Sessional Lecture, Royal British Nurses' Association, 17, Old Cavendish Street, on "Home Sanitation" (with lantern illustrations), by Henry Kenwood, Esq., M.B.Edin., D.P.H.St., 8 p.m.

The Duke of Marlborough presides at the annual meeting of the National Orthopædic Hospital, 4 p.m.

March 1st.—Annual meeting of the East London Nursing Society, in the Saloon at the Mansion House. The Lord Mayor will preside, 3 p.m.

The Duchess of Connaught lays the foundation-stone of a new hospital at Aldershot for Soldiers' Wives and Children.

Dr. Conan Doyle's reading in aid of the Mansion House Indian Famine Fund, at the Queen's Hall, Langham Place. Sir Walter Besant presides.

March 5th.—The Lord Mayor presides at a meeting at the Mansion House in aid of the Charing Cross Hospital special appeal for £100,000, 3 p.m.

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