

A Book of the Week.

"WOMEN NOVELISTS OF QUEEN VICTORIA'S REIGN."*

IN one of the latest accounts of the Queen's reign the narrator, who seemed to be well-informed, said, "All the Queen's favourite novelists are women." It was surely a very graceful thought on the part of Messrs. Hurst and Blackett, to make their tribute to the National Jubilee consist of a book of appreciations of women, by women.

Wonderful indeed has been the evolution of the novel during the present reign, and it is quite curious to note, as one cannot fail to do, when reading these pages, how a woman has been the pioneer of almost every new departure in the realms of fiction.

In the first paper, Mrs. Oliphant brings out, as I think very skilfully, just what it was that gave to "Jane Eyre" the wonderful vogue that she enjoyed. As a picture of life, that great book was of little value, for its author did not know life, and had never mixed either with the men or women of the class to which Rochester belonged. And as to the plot, I once heard a well-known literary man describe it as "superior London Journal." What was it that arrested the attention of every reader, so that, for blame or praise, the book could nowhere pass unnoticed? It was the first note of the revolt of woman. It was the very first time that the voice of woman had been made articulate, pleading for room and leave to "live her own life." Those words have since become a catch-word, meaning all kinds of things of which Charlotte Brönte never dreamed; but she was the author of the cry, of the claim to be something else than merely passive, to do something more than suffer and be still.

As the book is severely limited to authors who did not begin to publish before the Queen's accession, and includes only those who are no longer with us, there is, of course, no mention of those names which to-day are names to conjure with—but still the residuum is large and interesting. I feel specially grateful to Miss Adeline Sergeant for introducing me to a name with which I was not familiar—that of Mrs. Archer Clive, the writer of "Paul Ferroll"—the pioneer of novels with a bad man, or rather, an imperfect man, for their hero. Mrs. Crowe, also, the forerunner of the "Psychical Research Society," is noticed in the same interesting paper.

Mrs. Lynn Linton perhaps hardly does justice to George Eliot; her paper might almost rather be called a disparagement than an appreciation; but she very ably shows the limitations of a writer who seems to have been over-praised in the first burst of admiration which her genius called forth.

Mrs. Henry Wood, too, seems to deserve the credit of evolving the sensational novel in its less recent form. Personally, I must confess that she is a writer who has always totally failed to hold my attention, and I have never succeeded in getting through "East Lynne," though I have made several attempts. But no doubt she was an able and industrious writer.

Altogether, the book is one which should be read

by every Victorian woman; it is a record to make us proud, and all the papers are by those whose names, some day, will also be known to fame.

It may also be mentioned that the get-up of the volume is charming—it is not too large, type and paper are excellent, and the price is not high. It may be emphatically called a book to be bought.

G. M. R.

[Is it possible to over-praise the work of George Eliot? and does it not savour of sacrilege for Mrs. Lynn Linton, irately disloyal to her sex as she is—to criticise the writings of our greatest woman writer? ED.]

Bookland.

WHAT TO READ.

"Ode on the Completion of the Sixtieth Year of the Reign of Her Majesty Queen Victoria," by William John Courthope, C.B., M.A., Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford. (Oxford, at the Clarendon Press; London: Henry Frowde).

"The Light of the Eye," by H. T. Chaytor. Digby, Long & Co.)

"The Wisdom of Fools," by Margaret Deland. (Longmans, Green & Co.)

"Soldiers of Fortune," by Richard Harding Davis. (William Heinemann.)

"The Larramys," by George Ford. (Hutchinson & Co.)

"American Humorists," by Robert Ford. (Alex. Gardner.)

Coming Events.

June 29th.—Poplar Hospital; forty-second annual festival at the Holborn Restaurant, 7 p.m.

Morning performance at the Lyceum Theatre on behalf of the Queen's Commemoration Fund for Jubilee Nurses.

A meeting will take place at Stafford House in aid of the Farm Colony for Women, Duxhurst, Reigate. The Duchess of Sutherland and the Lady Henry Somerset will address the meeting. 3 p.m.

June 30th.—A public meeting in support of the Women's Institute, St. James's Hall, Piccadilly. Speakers: The Lady Henry Somerset, Miss E. P. Hughes, Mrs. Wynford Philipps. Reserved seats 5s. and 2s. 6d. 8 p.m.

July 7th.—Princess Christian, on Her Majesty's behalf, opens the new General Hospital at Birmingham.

July 15th.—Princess Christian lays the foundation stone of the Cancer Wing of the Middlesex Hospital.

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Sold in Sealed Packets and Tins only.

* "Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign." A Book of Appreciations, by Mrs. Oliphant, Mrs. Lynn Linton, and others. (Hurst and Blackett.)

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