

**A Book of the Week.****THE ENGRAFTED ROSE.\***

"The most remarkable thing about this book" says the reviewer in the *Spectator*, "is the fact that it is written by the author of 'A Superfluous Woman.'" To my mind it is even more remarkable that it is the work of the author of "The Confession of Stephen Whapshare."

"The Engrafted Rose" is an idyll of the North country, which nowhere revolts, nor challenges the accepted laws of ethics or morals.

The plot is an old-fashioned one; but the writing is, throughout, charming, and the threadbare notion of the substitution of one baby for another, is lost sight of, in view of the skilful treatment. The episode itself, however, will I fancy puzzle some of our obstetric nurses.

There is an old midwife, Tabitha Goggin by name, to whose cottage there comes one day a strange young woman in the pangs of labour. As she brings a little money in her hand, Tabitha puts her to bed in a room upstairs, and has hardly done so before she is called out to go to Mrs. Thoresbye, of Highborne House. She goes, leaving the suffering woman alone.

At Highborne House, the baby is born, dead, before the arrival of the doctor, who is detained elsewhere. Why the midwife should have been so terrified by this event is hardly clear, since as the doctor was not there, no blame could legally attach to her. But we are asked to believe that she seizes the dead child—it is a bitter winter evening—leaves her patient entirely alone, runs to her own cottage, some distance away, finds the outcast's child is born, and crying, runs upstairs, separates the child from its mother, wraps it up, carries it away, leaving the dead child in its place, reaches Highborne House—the house of well-to-do people, with plenty of servants—and succeeds in conveying this stolen baby, unseen, to the room where Mrs. Thoresbye lies, apparently having never missed her.

If you can accept this portion of the story, the rest is easy.

This baby, Rosamunda, the engrafted Rose, is the heroine of the story, and the darling of the Thoresbye household. These Thoresbys are most delightfully drawn, good and sound, and wholesome and narrow, refined, affectionate and intolerant, as were all such English middle class folk in the sixties, when the scene of the story is laid.

Rosamunda outrages all conventions, but is all the more tenderly loved, even when she declines to be confirmed, on the unquestionably sufficient ground that she is not quite sure whether there is a God, a phase of unbelief with which the village clergyman proves quite unable to cope.

The two young men are neither of them natural; their conversation is frequently of a cryptic description, and the conduct of Rosamunda when she discovers the secret of her parentage, is utterly and entirely unreasonable.

But in spite of all, the book makes charming reading. The author seems strongly under the influence of the Brontë sisters; much of the dialogue is especially reminiscent of "Shirley."

Miss Brooke is many sided. In this book her great appreciation of nature shows strongly. We shall await with wonder her next effort, but sincerely hope that it will resemble "The Engrafted Rose," much more nearly than "Stephen Whapshare." G. M. R.

\* By Emma Brooke, Hutchinson.

**Dramatic Notes.****HAMLET UNABRIDGED.**

The very interesting experiment of playing Hamlet in an almost unabridged form has been tried—as we lately mentioned that it was about to be tried—by Mr. F. R. Benson and his company at the Lyceum during the last fortnight, and has excited much interest in literary and dramatic circles. That the division of the Presentment into two performances—albeit afternoon and evening ones, with but an interval of barely two hours—tended somewhat to mar the coherency and consecutiveness of the play as an acting drama, can scarcely be gainsaid, and I cannot myself think that such a division was inevitable, seeing that, with but very slight abbreviations, greater rapidity of delivery in many passages and reduction or acceleration of various business, the original text could effectively as well as easily be given in three and a-half hours, and even an audience of to-day could surely be expected to give from 2.30 to 6, or from 7.30 to 11 for such a purpose. Still I do not wish to quarrel on this score with Mr. F. R. Benson's laudable attempt further than to point out that it would hardly be expedient, from a financial point of view, to divide Shakespeare's dramas in this manner on the plea that to give their text in full involved such a necessity. I think that Mr. Herman Vezin, admittedly the greatest elocutionist on our stage, could teach his confreres something in this matter. Touching Mr. F. R. Benson's impersonation of the leading rôle, it was a perfectly consistent one from his own standpoint, viz., that of "the melancholy Dane," but it is no derogation from his powers to say that it could not critically be called an ideal Hamlet, and this for the obvious reason that no "ideal Hamlet" has been seen within living memory, nor, perhaps, has any "ideal Hamlet" ever appeared on the stage since that marvellous character was created by Shakespeare's pen. Superficially the part, no doubt, as has been often remarked, plays itself, but that it has ever been adequately interpreted in all its breadth, depth and variety cannot be safely affirmed. Taking even the chief actors of the past and present generation, I must declare that to make a perfect Hamlet would need a combination of the versatility and subtlety of a Phelps with the solidity and force of a Charles Kean, the passion and emotion of a Fechter, the intellectual elocution of a Herman Vezin, the conversational ease of a G. V. Brooke or a Wilson Barrett, the grotesque imitation of insanity of an Irving, the technical skill of a Beerbohm Tree, and the graceful physique of a Forbes-Robertson. As then only a heaven-born exponent of the part could be expected to combine all these qualifications in himself, I am sure that Mr. F. R. Benson will be satisfied when I say that this Hamlet—barring a few textual errors—may be counted as an embodiment of a most creditable order. That he was supported by a company of very considerable histrionic talent (and this notably in the cases of Mr. Alfred Brydone as Polonius, Mr. Oscar Asche as Claudius—the King—Mr. Frank Rodney as Laertes, Mr. G. R. Weir as the First Grave-digger, Miss Ada Ferrar as the Queen—one of the best interpreters of the part I have ever seen—and by Mrs. Benson as a charming Ophelia) only redounds to the Actor-Manager's discernment, and I trust that his forthcoming Shakespearian revivals will all be distinguished by similar good judgment. E. GILBERT HIGHTON.

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