

A Book of the Week.

THE PINCH OF PROSPERITY.*

Our readers will remember that Mr. Vachell's book "The Shadowy Third" was favourably reviewed in these pages. His present work is not only not a falling off, but a positive advance upon what he has done before. "The Pinch of Prosperity" would be, but for one fault, a most convincing, telling piece of work. The fault is, unfortunately, one that is intrinsic; the whole story hangs upon the impossible fact of a pair of twin sisters, so exactly alike in face, voice, manners, handwriting, habits, and so on, that even the people with whom they live, and the men who are in love with them, are completely deceived, not for a day, but permanently, when they exchange names. If once this inherent impossibility be admitted, then all that follows is admirable; but most readers will find it hard to believe. The superficial likeness between twins is often extraordinary; but this likeness almost disappears to the eye of those who know the essential difference of character. Character makes expression, and expression will quickly differentiate the most similar features, and the character of the weak, vain, frivolous Daphne, so unlike the steadfast, loyal, large-minded Bridget, must have established between her and her twin a distinction that nobody could have failed to note.

The book, however, is in all respects so greatly above the ordinary level that it can be warmly recommended to all kinds of readers. In some of his dialogue Mr. Vachell narrowly escapes achieving brilliancy, and wholly succeeds in smartness of the kind so dear to the modern public. There is some excellent hitting-off of the popular crazes—Mrs. Bidgood, the apostle of the New Gnosticism, the denier of the existence of pain and of matter, is very amusing; and her instant swerving from the path of Christian Science, when her little girl is knocked down in the street and carried to a hospital, is delightfully done.

"The Priestess . . . became of a sudden a devout believer in scalpel and bistoury. Indeed, an indiscreet friend, who urged the mother to bespeak the services of a distinguished female Healer (at only ten guineas a week), was scourged out of Portland Place beneath the lash of a tongue leaded with despair. 'When I think,' said Lavinia, 'that I was reading a paper at the Club, a paper on the Care and Culture of Children, at the very moment when my darling was lying under those cruel wheels, I feel as if I should go mad. This is a judgment on me.'"

The Dowager Lady Quest, with her Personal Devil, is another very happy thumb-nail sketch; but perhaps the best thing in the book—the portion in which the author gets nearest to real greatness—is the story of Pretty Parslow and her mother, and of Max Orpin's connection with them. The dreadful hypocritical old drunkard, always, when tipsy, recurring to the hymns she learnt as a child in a Hampshire Sunday-school, and Pretty's loyalty to her, are wonderfully given.

"Abide with me, fast falls the eventide,
The darkness deepens—"

"Max rushed across the landing. 'Shut up!' he shouted. 'That's my favourite hymn, and I won't have it mangled by you, old girl. D'ye hear me? Shut up!'"

* By Horace Annesley Vachell. John Murray.

"The quavering voice died away, and Max returned to his own hearth, slamming the door of the room with unnecessary violence.

"'I ain't goin' to leave mother,' said Pretty. 'I don't s'pose the Lord will abide with her; but I shall.'"

The final apotheosis of old Mrs. Parslow is a well-designed and quite possible occurrence.

We feel a little inclined to quarrel with Mr. Vachell on one count. He is in no need of seeking to enlarge his public by a few cheap sneers at religion. From the general tenor of his book we gather that he is really on the side of the angels; and there are one or two unnecessary little bits of flippancy and bad taste, which have the look of being inserted to please the kind of reader to whom no consideration should be shown. We believe the author himself would know exactly which we mean.

G. M. R.

A June Song.

Into the garden now
Softly she goes,
Lighting the leafy bough,
Waking the rose,
Stirring the dreamy hush
Into a tune:
Listen, again the thrush
Sings—June!

Buds in the fragrant tree
Blossom and shine;
Forth on his quest the bee
Flits to the vine;
Music and gladness fill
Daybreak and noon:
Listen, the lyric rill
Sings—June!

Here in the scented gloom
Sweet with the dew,
Breathing the breath of bloom
Under the blue
Night of the summer-time
With its pale moon,
Listen, the world in rhyme
Sings—June!

—FRANK DEMPSTER SHERMAN,
in the *Munsey*.

Coming Events.

June 13th.—Princess Louise (Duchess of Argyll) opens the new buildings for the Hospital for Epilepsy and Paralysis, Maida Vale.

June 20th.—General Meeting of the League of St. John's House Nurses, St. John's House, 2.30 p.m. Social Gathering, 4.30 p.m.

June 22nd.—The Women Writers' Dinner, Criterion Restaurant, 7.45. Chairman, Mrs. J. R. Green.

June 27th.—General Meeting of the League of St. Bartholomew's Hospital Nurses, Great Hall of the Hospital, 3 p.m. Social Gathering, 4.30 p.m. Presentation to Miss Courtenay-Smith, Assistant Matron, upon resignation of office.

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