

A Book of the Week.

THE GREY WORLD.*

Probably nobody would be more surprised than the writer of "The Grey World" to hear her book described as a religious book. Yet such it is, in one very true sense of the word. Fresh from its perusal, and full of the strong charm of its manner, one is almost tempted to say that it is a revelation.

After all, there is in this world only a certain amount of truth; and, in every age, certain truths get frayed with wear, degenerate into platitudes, and cease to have any grip over the mind. The rehabilitation of such a truth is the work of the prophet, the poet, or—at times—the novelist. Some of those books which have exerted the most vital influence over their time, such as "The Sorrows of Werther," for example, owe their magic force to this fact, that they re-announced, in such a form that the world could grasp it, some outworn truth lately much in the background.

It is precisely this which Miss Underhill undertakes to do. The truth she raises from the dead is this: "Except a man be born again, of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Now the method of showing this which is adopted by the author is original and striking. There used to be a funny old way of working sums, known as the Rule of False, in which you assumed something which was false to start with, in order to prove a proposition which ended by being demonstrably true. Miss Underhill assumes the return to this earthly phase of existence of a spirit which has once passed out. The spirit is that of a little London child of the slums.

"He was one of those brisk, sharp-witted children of the streets whose every interest is an appetite, and whose world of joy and sorrow is bounded at either end by the Crystal Palace and the police-court."

The italics are the reviewer's. Are not these words quite wonderfully true of thousands of the people we meet nowadays? Change the formula ever so slightly—let it read, "Her world of joy and sorrow is bounded at either end by Monte Carlo and the divorce court"—and you get just such another spirit as the one Miss Underhill is describing.

"Now, without understanding the how or why of the matter, he was summarily divorced from the lean and active body which had interpreted all his pleasures, and found himself converted into a pure spirit to whom the material universe was no more actual than the air and other invisible gases are to living men. . . . He had taken nothing into death but those qualities which he had managed to elaborate during his little life."

Here is Miss Underhill's truth. It goes without saying that it is a truth well understood by the religious; but it is one of the materialist's greatest stumbling-blocks. And it is simply this: Hell is made by character; hell is character. The wicked is not arbitrarily cast into hell, as into an element for which he is not prepared; he is simply left where he has taken himself. The non-spiritual can no more descry the Beatific vision than the eyes of the dead can behold the sun.

This forlorn spirit waif, alone in the Grey world, is re-born into the world of men; and re-born with the memory of his past. And to him, who knows now the only

realities, the non-spiritual quality of the human race is a monstrous marvel. To him—who knows that, after their short sojourn in the body, their stunted, miserable remnant must go on unceasingly—their jovial indifference, the importance they attach to creature comforts, is wholly inconceivable.

Miss Underhill, with extraordinary insight and care, and just the right amount of detail, works out the problem of a part of the existence of Willie. He is re-born into a middle-class suburban family, whose religion is a mere formula, a thing wholly external to life. He has to arrive, as it were, at a working hypothesis, and when we leave him he has by no means arrived. His chronicler allows him no help at all. She does not even hint at the mine of wealth which lies ready to his spirit, should he happen to come across such a work as, for example, the book of Job or the Gospel of St. John. He has to adjust the universe to his needs as though nobody had ever been that way before. This is, of course, wise of the author; because had she hinted that there are in existence charts of the Undiscovered Country, and millions who are at this moment by their help walking steadfastly through in the radiance cast by the Light of the World, she would at once forfeit the sympathy of all those whom this book was evidently designed to help.

For in these days we must each discover our own universe. The "one man one religion" age is hard upon us. Mr. Kipling has quite recently discovered England—with the aid of a motor-car. After this, to discover Eternity with a microscope seems to be the next thing that might be attempted with success.

We do not leave Willie actually in the dungeons of Giant Despair; but his hesitating feet are far indeed from the Celestial City, from which, nevertheless, no one of us is ever more than a hand's breadth removed.

Our interest in the main tendency of this wonderful book has left no space to talk of the author's admirable style, nor of the character studies, every one of which rings true to life. She is warmly to be congratulated on her first venture. We only trust that it may not prove caviare to the general. It cannot fail to interest thinking women.

G. M. R.

The Dreamer.

He gave his days to dreaming,
And high content was his;
Great store had he of learning
In all the mysteries.

He thought, when he was wakened,
'Twas now his hour to live;
But Time, the kind old Father,
Had only death to give.

—H. D. Lowry, *Pall Mall Magazine*.

Coming Events.

October 7th.—Quarterly Meeting of Executive Committee of the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses, 431, Oxford Street, 4 p.m.

October 8th.—The Duchess of Albany opens the new operating theatre of the National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic, Queen Square, Bloomsbury, 3.30.

* By Evelyn Underhill. (Heinemann.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)