

## A Book of the Week.

### MRS. ALEMERE'S ELOPEMENT.\*

Mr. Marriott is always worth reading, but his present book is in many respects particularly so. He has had a definite idea, and he has not spared thought in the working out. From beginning to end there is no violation of probabilities, the ball is set rolling, and the inevitable far-reaching results follow. The idea in the mind of the writer has been to figure forth to himself, and also to the reader, what would have been the effect on Caponsacchi if Pompilia had been, not Pompilia, but something lower. In order to produce a Caponsacchi, one has to pre-suppose a Pompilia, one worthy of his knight-errantry, and as clean in mind as himself. When the impulsive, boyish, brilliant Dick Feddon is persuaded by Evelyn Alemere to remove her from the misery of life with a husband whom she neither likes nor understands, he is willing to play Caponsacchi, and does so valiantly. But the woman is by no means of the stuff of which heroines are made. Evelyn has always, even before her marriage to Alemere, been in love with Antony Palliser. To be removed from Alemere, legally free of him, is the first step. Palliser cannot oblige her here, since he is in Africa. Therefore she makes use of Dick, chivalrous, adoring Dick, who will do the deed and claim no price for his services. She holds out vague hopes of marrying him eventually—an ultimate heaven to which romantic Dick had hardly dare lift up his eyes, the eyes of an idealist. The lady of his worship keeps him skilfully in play, until, her divorce obtained, Palliser steps in, and reaps the fruit of Dick's Quixotism. That is the notion of the story—an entirely original notion, yet, so far as one knows, quite a probable one.

Evelyn Alemere is painted well, and not at all over-drawn. Her deceit and her materialism are sketched in with such light touches, one feels she would have deceived even the very elect. Her heavy, honest husband too, driven to whisky because of his unhappiness with her, his exasperation at his failure to understand her, culminating in the blow which gives her the final excuse for escape—this character is admirably drawn.

The writer's personal bias makes him unfair to Dick's mother. She is a quite incredibly unlovable person. The same bias is very obvious in the slight sketch of the Dean. One sees Mr. Marriott's point of view in one unlucky phrase—"The Vicar, gabbling week-day Evensong to a congregation of three old women and a district nurse!" One sees how little influence must inevitably have been possessed by a Vicar who addressed his prayer to the members of the congregation! O, alas! for the unco' clever, like Mr. Marriott, when they try to expound their own truly astonishing point of view! One feels how the whole meaning of the things prized by the religious passes this author by completely, and is uncomfortably reminded of an ancient saying about pearls and swine.

But in spite of bias, the book is a really able one. It gives the non-religious case as regards divorce with singular candour and absence of bitterness. Palliser, the man who could condone, in the woman he loved, anything but the one fact of her telling him lies, is a bitter satire upon certain phases of modern thought.

The persistency with which a man will believe that a woman who will break all her vows to someone else will infallibly keep her vows to himself, is a continual

pathetic example of the way in which a man is bereft of judgment in his dealings with woman.

One must not forget, in praising this book, that, like all by this author, a knowledge of music, a deep love of it, and a really uncanny power to describe its effects upon the emotions, add greatly to the general effect, and atone for a good deal of bluntness in other directions.

G. M. R.

## Browsing.

I enjoy everything written by Miss Mollett, because even if one does not agree with every sentiment she expresses, the spontaneity of her style is so refreshing.

To see things literary on equal terms with her, pre-supposes that one's father had a library, that in one's youth one had become conversant with three languages, and that the joy of travel had been ours. Now I am one of thousands of middle-class women who have had no such chances, and would that I could recall all the wasted hours of youth spent in reading trash. Miss Mollett will argue that if I enjoyed trash, it was not waste of time, and, moreover, even if it was, I am one of those "who do not matter."

Is this quite fair argument? Here am I, a farmer's daughter, a plain man, moreover, who inscribed our births in the family Bible, read his county paper weekly, quoting to his patient womenfolk items relating to fat stock, the quality of turnips, and the weather—the everlastingly wrong, cantankerous weather. Mother had her *Family Herald* and three volumes of fiction (in my youth the orthodox novel was still published in three volumes) by carrier from our market town every Saturday. We did not possess a copy of Shakespeare's works, the name of Ruskin was quite unknown, and in our benighted village no lover of books resided. Even the Bible was thought improper in parts—at least those parts which conveyed to me some sense of symphony and song.

Thus till my seventeenth year, and then one day a daughter of the squire, who had married an officer and been round the world, came home. As I first saw her in church, in the old-fashioned chancel pew, I see her now—a spirited creature, very willowy and upright, her gown all peach tinted and billowy, and perched on top of a mass of bright gold hair a little quilled mauve aërophane bonnet, her face as brilliant as her bonnet.

"A fine French madame," poor mother called her as we went home between the graves, but father was more wise. "Nay, mother," said he, "her beauty's more'n skin deep—the light's wi'in."

Later, she came to visit mother. We were old tenants, and she soon won all hearts. The diaphanous gowns were Parisian certainly, and her grace was rare. Most of all, we loved her little expressive white nose, but it was the "light within" that inspired the taste, the irresistible gaiety, and the sympathy that enslaved us all.

"Your father would just give her gold if she could eat it," I once heard my mother say.

Then dawned a memorable day. We met in the parlour, where the family Bible and the *Family Herald* reposed side by side on a crochet mat. The dear lady took up the latter, read a line or two, and looked gravely over the edge at me. Then she smiled.

"Come into the hay field," she said, "and let us read the war news with a map (it was '77). Then we

\* By Charles Marriott. (Nash.)

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