

Book of the Week.

BLANCHE ESMEAD.*

Those who know the charm of Mrs. Fuller Maitland's style will not need to be told that this book is well written. It is even very well written, and the people in it are life like and natural—the kind of people you meet everywhere, a little selfish, mostly mediocre, but each with some good within.

That with which I quarrel is the unfair assumption with which the authoress begins her story. As a kind of explanatory preface the following paragraph appears on the front page:—

"We see a number of human beings placed in certain circumstances; and we see, arising from the co-operation of these characters in these circumstances, certain actions. These actions beget others again, until this series of inter-connected deeds leads, by an apparently inevitable sequence, to a catastrophe."

This is a fairly high aim for a novelist to set before her, no less high than the mission of the old Greek tragedians, to show the inevitableness with which effect follows cause. The truth that Mrs. Fuller Maitland here shows forth, is a trifle stale—namely, that if a woman marries a man she does not care for, and has no children and no occupation, she is pretty certain to fall in love with another man.

But then surely, by circumstances, the old Greeks meant the march of a fate one could not help. One is born a gambler's daughter, or beggared by someone else's imprudence, or maimed in a railway accident, or killed by an eruption or a flood. These things are a part of the order of the world which can be but very indirectly interfered with, and nobody can stand wholly outside the reach of accident, though by prudence and foresight many seemingly inevitable things may be avoided. But Mrs. Fuller Maitland asks us to start by believing that Blanche Aylmer, of her own free will, married John Esmead. The only thing we find to answer is, she could not possibly have done it, but if she did she deserved the worst consequences. We have no pity for her; and her destiny is the result of her own flying in the face of congruities, and is not only not inevitable, but is provoked by a recklessness and lack of intelligence which are almost criminal.

Blanche is an aristocrat, daintily sensitive, spoilt, indolent, and egotistical. John is half-educated, of plebeian birth, and belongs to the category of cheerful bores, than which perhaps there breathes no deadlier thing. In his unselfishness, his devotion to duty, his unworldliness and his care for the poor, he is worth a dozen of his namby-pamby, selfish little wife, who is outraged by the silliness of his speeches, the size of his boots, his appetite, his prattle, above all his denseness.

No doubt it is a tragedy, but no doubt also it could and should have been avoided.

There is hardly any plot. Blanche falls in love, but is kept back from ultimate results, and the Vicar thoughtfully gets himself run over by a motor-car.

* By Ella Fuller Maitland. (Methuen.)

The wonderful part of it all is the faithful delineation of John's character by Mrs. Fuller Maitland. From beginning to end of the story he never once says a word that you are not convinced he would have said. The house and surroundings among which he is content to dwell are also sketched in with rare skill. We wish the author would find a slightly newer basis for her next fiction. This story of the uncongenially mated woman begins to nauseate with repetition; and one feels that the whole plot is known before the first chapter is finished.

G. M. R.

Verses.

Day!
Faster and more fast,
O'er night's brim, day boils at last;
Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim,
Where spurting and suppress it lay—
For not a froth-flake touched the rim
Of yonder gap in the solid grey
Of the eastern cloud, an hour away;
But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,
Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppress,
Rose, reddened, and its seething breast
Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed the
world

Oh! Day, if I squander a wavelet of thee,
A mite of my twelve-hours' treasure,
The least of thy gazes or glances,
(Be they grants thou art bound to, or gifts above
measure),
One of thy choices, or one of thy chances,
(Be they tasks God imposed thee, or freaks at thy
pleasure)
My day if I squander such labour or leisure,
Then shame fall on Asolo, mischief on me!

* * * * *
The year's at the spring,
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in His heaven—
All's right with the world!

ROBERT BROWNING.

From "Pippa Passes."

What to Read.

"Ring in the New." By Richard Whitsing.
"By the Waters of Carthage." By Norma Lorimer.
"The Grey Domino." By Mrs. Philip Champion de Crespigny.
"The Way of the Spirit." By Rider Haggard.

A Word for the Week.

If you wish success in life, make Perseverance your bosom friend, Experience your wise counsellor, Caution your elder brother, and Hope your guardian genius.

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