

Book of the Week.

A LADY OF ROME.*

Mr. Crawford gives us another tale of Roman society as he knows it. We are beginning to feel almost as though we know too many of its ins and outs to care much to hear more; the people are rather limited people, there is a sameness about their palaces, their secret passages and their love affairs. But Mr. Crawford has the pen of a magician. He can, undoubtedly, still interest us in his chosen field, even though the Saracinesca come in at intervals throughout.

The heroine of his present book is Maria, Countess of Montalto. She is young and beautiful and has been separated from her husband, who adored her, for eight years—for the most fatal of reasons—namely, that her child is not his, and he knows it.

To make such a woman the heroine of a story shows boldness. That is to say, it shows boldness in an author who is usually found on the side of the angels. The woman who, loving one man, is married to another, is to be pitied. But if she have any womanly dignity, any religion, any sense of duty, she does not as a rule trust herself with her ardent, ruthless lover, in such circumstances as to make it easy for him to ruin her. We think that the author throughout hardly realises how hard he makes it for his readers to look upon Maria as the dignified, high-minded, refined lady she is painted in his pages.

Her husband, who is popularly supposed a cruel tyrant, has behaved like a hero. He has gone away, nominally to solace the declining years of his Spanish mother, an old and infirm lady who cannot travel. But after a while this mother dies, and Diego, who still loves the woman who has dragged his honour in the dust, writes to her suggesting complete reconciliation. At this time the lover has again made his appearance. Maria has met him, has suffered him to kiss her, has entered into a long correspondence with him. We cannot believe that any sincerely penitent woman would so behave. She is conscious that she loves him wildly; she is conscious that he loves her with as much passion as ever; she affects to believe that on these foundations a platonic friendship can be built. We know that she was not sincere, but we cannot even feel, as Mr. Crawford wishes us to do, that she even supposed herself to be sincere.

Her husband comes back, and she is punished by the daily, hourly torture of his presence, his caresses, his demonstrations of affection.

She comes very near wrecking all by her ill-considered behaviour. But Diego, spotless gentleman, dies, and we are left to understand that the guilty lovers were united.

This, baldly stated, makes you wonder that such a book should be recommended. But it has wonderful moments. The sum of it might perhaps be expressed in the motto, "Confession is good for the soul."

The Countess Maria has a perfect genius for confession; and in her last resort she actually persuades her confessor to do her dirty work for her,—to go

* Marion Crawford. (Macmillan.)

and prevail upon her lover to force a certain scoundrel to give up compromising letters.

The character of the man who sinned with her is also a most interesting study. The men in the story are both infinitely superior to the woman whom both love, and who does nothing whatever that we can see to be worthy of their love, beyond being beautiful, which she cannot help, and refined, which is a matter of education and temperament. One is sorry both for Diego and Baldassare. G.M.R.

The Mistletoe.

A Druid stood in a dark oak wood
Of a distant northern land,
And he seemed to hold a sickle of gold
In the grasp of his withered hand;
And he moved him slowly round the girth
Of an aged oak to see
If an orphan plant of wondrous birth
Had clung to the old oak tree.
And anon he knelt, and from his belt
Unloosened his golden blade,
Then rose and culled the Mistletoe
Under the woodland shade.

O Blessed bough, meet emblem thou
Of all dark Egypt knew.
Of all foretold to the wise of old
To Roman, Greek and Jew.
And long, God grant, time-honoured plant,
Live we to see thee hung
In cottage small, as in baron's hall
Banner and shield among!
Thus fitly rule the mirth of Yule
Aloft in thy place of pride,
Still usher forth, in each land of the North,
The solemn Christmas Tide!

REV. F. MAHONEY.

What to Read.

"The Flight of Marie Antoinette." From the French of G. Lenotre.

"Sidney Herbert, Lord Herbert of Lea." A Memoir. By Lord Stanmore.

"Rezánov." By Gertrude Atherton.

Coming Events.

January 1st.—New Year's Day.

January 1st and 2nd.—Christmas Entertainments, Great Hall, St Bartholomew's Hospital, E.C.

Other hospital entertainments throughout the week.

A Word for the Week.

"Let a man contend to the uttermost for his life's set prize, be it what it will! . . . The sin I impute to each frustrate ghost is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin."—Robert Browning.

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