

erratic and unnatural manner. The object that Iota sets before herself to study is best understood by reading the quotation from the title page of the novel :—

“ And if this fought-for climax *is* ever reached, and science creeping along the path of experiment so invades the realm of Nature that a blue chrysanthemum or ‘ A Yellow Aster ’ can be produced at will, the question still remains, has Nature been made more beautiful thereby ? ”

The principal character in the first volume is an abnormal woman, who, though devoted to her husband, is entirely wrapt up in the scientific research of obscure fossils and bones. Husband and wife comprehend each other perfectly ; their conversation together is exasperating ; they are (at any rate, at the beginning of the books) theoretical people, and creations of an intelligent woman’s brains invented to carry out her theories ; but prick them, and they will bleed saw-dust and not blood ; they are not alive, and do not raise in us that awakened interest, that an artist in literature can arouse with a few graphic words. These wooden parents have peculiar views as to the education of their offspring, and they call upon the rector of their parish and his American wife in order that they may expound these views for their edification and instruction. The children are not to be sent to school ; all Christian teaching is to be tabooed ; they are to learn to know God in his works with a capital W, and when they are older, unbiassed by previous opinions, they can receive or reject religion as taught by the Bible, and any other evidence of Christianity.

The rector and his fascinating wife are an interesting contrast, and are well and vividly described. Mrs. Bellow says, after the famous interview, “ Why should two beautiful children’s lives be spoilt for the vagaries of a pair who never had any right to bear children ? ” That sentence is the key-note of the first volume. The wooden parents were, however, most conscientious, and fretted themselves, and the children and all the children’s tutors and instructors nearly silly with their endeavours to carry out their peculiar principles. The effects of their system are not very lasting upon their commonplace son, Dacre, who goes away from home and becomes an average regimental man. But the girl Gwen is different, she has never known a mother’s tender love, or a father’s affectionate spoiling ; the result is that she grows up beautiful and handsome, but as cold as ice, and perfectly incapable of love—“ she was empty about the heart.” Sir Humphry Strange falls in love with her, and she, after some hesitation, consents to marry him. So far, the book is commonplace and devoid of interest ; but another note is struck when, on Gwen’s marriage morning, for the first time in her narrow existence, Gwen’s mother’s maternal instinct and love awakens. The saving power of maternity is the gospel according to the third volume.

Throughout the beginning of the story the situations are strained, and the style is awkward, for the phrases and paragraphs are wanting in balance ; and, in fact, the whole writing of the book is amateurish in the extreme. Even the first chapter in the third volume is far from free from these blemishes, and the scene when Gwen’s husband risks his life to save a child, and Gwen herself remains entirely unmoved by either his danger or his heroism, is wanting in *actuality*—

that is, that though the reader feels vaguely interested, he never, for an instant, feels that these characters were ever alive or ever behaved in the manner that is described in the novel.

But chapter xxxiii. brings in a new order of things. Mr. Waring says of his wife—

“ This maternal feeling must certainly be a very powerful and a very precious factor in a woman’s making, or such an one as my wife would not be so touched and shaken by its advent and growth in her. It is a mystery in truth thus to come so late, born out of due season as it were, and so strongly to take possession of her. I certainly never should have classed her among the true mothers—the producing women ; they should be of a more robust, a more animal type altogether. It is a most remarkable case, with curious complications.”

The development of Mrs. Waring’s character, the awakening of her love for her daughter, too late, is most pathetic reading.

“ Mrs. Waring’s nervous, gentle, little attempts at being a mother ; the delicate tendrils she kept constantly throwing out in her daughter’s direction ; her queer quaint experiments in the expression of the emotions simply worried Gwen to death. She refused to let herself see the pathos of it all, or to be touched. ‘ Mother, she cried, you couldn’t be expected to understand children, you were meant for intellectual uses altogether ! It seems to be hard and unjust that you should now be hampered with these feelings. Why can you not go back to your old peaceful life ? ’ ”

That is powerful writing, and leads one to think that if “ Iota ” served a longer apprenticeship in learning the *technique* of the art of literature, she might some day produce a really fine book. The scene of the mother’s death is not pathetic, and is wanting in softness and delicacy of touch. In one passage especially, when the mother plays with her grown-up daughter’s fingers, in her delirium, telling them with low silvery laughter that this little pig went to market, etc. ; we are fatally reminded that it is a short step only from the sublime to the ridiculous !

Gwen’s mother dies, but Gwen’s happiness is saved by her baby, whose tiny fingers bring his parent’s hearts together. The book (though, as a whole, we suspect it will interest women more than men) illustrates the truth of the aphorism—that a woman is only half a woman till she is a wife, and three-quarters of a woman till she is a mother.

A. M. G.

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## Inventions, Preparations, &c.

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An improved, flexible spatula, made by Mr. Henry Steer, of Derby, has been submitted to us, and appears to have advantages over those which are in ordinary use, inasmuch as it is flexible, of a very convenient size, silver plated, and, therefore, easily kept clean, and considerably less in price than that of the article in ordinary use. We are, therefore, not surprised to hear that, whenever used, it is approved of by Nurses, and that it is being employed in several large Hospitals.

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