

Comyns Carr. It is the old story of the affection and esteem existing between husband and wife being disturbed by the entrance of a third party. In this case, it is the best of Knights among Sir Arthur's followers—Sir Lancelot, who, true to the best within him, knowing that his only safety is in flight, determines to join in the quest for the Holy Grail. Here let it be mentioned that the Holy Grail, which is a pivot of the legendary story, is here only a circumstance in the passion of the two chief characters of the play. Arthur, unconscious of the imminent danger, bids Guinevere persuade Lancelot to stay. This gives an opportunity for a touching scene, in which they mutually confess their love. Guinevere, also true, bids Lancelot go on the Quest. But Arthur, with that strange blindness which seems often to wrap round the honourable, is himself made a tool in the hand of Fate for his own destruction. He commands Lancelot, through Guinevere, to stay, and Elaine, in the fulness of her unrequited love, begs her to overcome his scruples; and, at the dangerous command, a tremor runs through the assembly of knights ready to depart, which communicates itself to the audience.

The rest of the play is only a development towards the inevitable consequence. There is an idyllic woodland scene in which the Queen with her maidens go Maying. Here Guinevere meets Lancelot, and the two give themselves up to the violence of their love, "lip to lip." But enemies are lurking near in Morgan le Fay and Sir Mordred, who, at the ripe moment, betray the pair to the unsuspecting Arthur. Then evil days fall upon England. The scabbard of Excalibur, more powerful than the blade, is lost. Arthur is wounded to the death, and bids Sir Bedevere in attendance, to throw his sword into the sea; a departure from the original story, which brings out the pretty conceit that "England's sword is in the sea." And at that hour when darkness is all around, there appears the strange weird barge, with its three Queens of Night, which is to bear away the body of Arthur to that land "whose sleep can heal all earthly wounds."

Then the audience, too, departs to a neighbouring land; after nearly four hours spent in the best of company.

A Book of the Week.

"SOME MEN ARE SUCH GENTLEMEN."*

As compared with many bad or merely indifferent books, of the making of which there really seems to be no end, there are strangely few novels issued at the present day which can be truthfully praised. Those few that are well and vividly written are too often disfigured or mutilated by being written and published "with a purpose" to renovate everything, to belaud the New Woman, or to revile the Old Man.

It is, therefore, with a sigh of real relief that one finds in the latest production of Dr. Arabella Kenealy's facile pen a book which reminds one of Thackeray at his best. The story itself is simple, for of plot there is little or none; the involved intricacies of one school of novelists, and the raw realism of another, are evidently alike uncongenial to our authoress, and she will find a very considerable section of the British

public who will cordially agree with her, and who will, therefore, warmly appreciate her new story. An old house, dilapidated, ivy-covered, weather-worn, with ruin stamped on everything inside and out—its bells broken, its ancient drawbridge reduced to one plank over a moat in whose green slime snakes crawl—inhabited by grandmother and granddaughter, the last scions of an ancient family, poverty-struck to the last extent—neglected, solitary, forsaken. The story centres round the old place, and shows how the young heiress of an old name, and nothing more, grew up from childhood to womanhood; how in a pitiful boyish disguise she attempted to rob the larder at the parsonage; how she was caught, and how the young doctor, mistaking her sex, gave her a whipping to cure her predatory propensities; how long after, he was called in to treat the old grandmother in an attack of angina—which is excellently described as might have been expected—and discovers the identity of the boy he whipped. Then the old, old story began and continued. The villain of the piece is not nearly so consistent a character. He plays upon the romantic feelings of the heroine, so that she admits him to the house on his statement that he is a fugitive from justice, and, as she thinks, keeps him in safe hiding—a condition of affairs which, speedily becoming known, so aroused the sensibilities of the village Grundies that they stormed the old house. Then the deluge! The heroine shoots with her ancient blunderbuss at the mob; the mob stone an ancient kite, which with many bats inhabited the house. The ancient grandmother suddenly dies, and the heroine shoots her lover, and the curtains fall dramatically at the moment when his wounds are being attended to and everything has been quite satisfactorily explained. Several of the scenes in the book are most dramatically told, and there are vivid descriptions of the desolate, dust-ridden, bat-infested rooms, and of the solemp, silent tea-party which the heroine holds every day, the long row of ancestors in their frames on the wall having each a cup and saucer placed opposite to him or her so that their descendant can feel in her solitude that she has some company, in the shape of her dead and gone forefathers. The description of the old overcrowded garden is one of the best pieces of writing with which we have met for some time, and the following touch of word-painting well deserves to be widely quoted:—

"Columbines stretched on slender tip-toes prettily pleading for life, and tinkling low-voiced music out of purple bells. Every flowering plant and tree trod on its neighbour's toes, and thrust its flushing face into its fellow's, pouting delicate lips and crying 'More room.' Masses of myrtle green syringa for all its green humility and modest blossom crowded the over-grown space, and surfeited the swooning air with a heavy honey of sweetness. The whole scene was one of press and petulance and pretty apology, for the finer-mannered of the flowers besought perpetual pardon for the importunate heedless trespass of their younger shoots and branches."

In short, the book is a romance, and an excellent one; none the worse, nay, rather the better, because it is of a somewhat old-fashioned type, written in fluent facile English; wholly free from the faults of grammar, composition, and erroneous quotations which disfigure the work of so many writers of the present day. Miss Kenealy's work is always original, and her last essay in literature will increase the high reputation which she has already and most deservedly earned.

* "Some Men are such Gentlemen." By Dr. Arabella Kenealy. Digby, Long and Co.)

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