

## A Book of the Week.

## "CELIBATES."\*

LAST year I reviewed "Esther Waters," by George Moore, in this column. I ventured to say that in spite of some unnecessary coarseness of detail, this book was a fine piece of literary work, and a deeply interesting study of an unwedded mother's desperate struggle for the life and maintenance of her child. Esther Waters herself was by nature a noble woman, and her innate nobility of character showed itself in her brave campaign in this difficult and, to "found out" sinners, heartless world. Having admired "Esther Waters" so greatly, and having taken deeply to heart the lesson of humanity that it was so evidently intended to inculcate, I opened Mr. George Moore's new volume of three stories with expectation and interest, and now, after finishing the last tale of the three, I must own that I consider them all entirely unworthy of the vigorous author of "Esther Waters." I was surprised to find myself so deeply in sympathy with that book, and I am equally surprised to find myself entirely out of sympathy with "Celibates" and their author. The longer I live the more convinced I am of the great allegorical truth contained in R. L. Stevenson's story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The only thing that accounts to my mind for the same writer having produced "Esther Waters" and "Celibates" is the supposition that Mr. Moore is possessed of a dual personality, and that, as Dr. Jekyll, he wrote the first, and then relapsed and became Mr. Hyde before he wrote the second. If I had not admired the first so greatly I should never have wished to read the second, and as it is to be suspected that many of our readers may feel the same, I have decided to write a short notice of "Celibates" as my book of this week.

The first story, "Mildred Lawson," is a clever but rather cold-hearted study of a middle-class girl who kept her dull brother's dull house in the suburbs, and was engaged to a dull man. She longed for more excitement and amusement than was possible from her narrow outlook upon life, so she deserted her brother, her housekeeping, and her lover, and went over to Paris as an art student. It is possible that the descriptions of art student life in Paris may be realistic, but they are hopelessly dreary and dull, and Mildred Lawson herself is such an odious young woman that one cannot take any vital interest in her adventures, and it hopelessly handicaps a story when the reader from the first dislikes the heroine, and is sincerely glad when she is paid out all round for her hopeless egoism. The last paragraph, however, almost redeems the story. It is so vigorously written, and contains such a powerful moral. Mildred Lawson has cast away from her all consideration for anyone but her own dreary self, and this is how she expiates her sin:

"She cared for nothing in the world, she did not know what was going to become of her; the burden of life seemed so unbearable, she felt so unhappy. She lay quite still, with her eyes open, seeing the questions go round like the hands of a clock; the very words sounded as loud and distinct in her brain as the ticking of a clock, her nerves were shattered, and life grew terribly distinct in the insomnia of the hot summer night. . . . She threw herself

over and over in her burning bed, until at last her soul cried out of its lucid misery: 'Give me a passion for God or man, but give me a passion, I cannot live without one.'"

Truly, if "the mill of the gods" grind the egoist slowly yet it grinds "exceeding small."

One thing modern literature is, I think, doing for this generation: it has shown that ingrained selfishness is not a fault but a sin. The German writer, Max Nordau, has written to try and prove that egomaniacism is a disease, and tales like this of George Moore's shows it to be also a burning and enduring misery.

The next tale is so terrible and so shocking that I had rather not review it at all. Few people happily will understand it; personally I should never have done so if it had not been for an enlightening review, but if anyone does comprehend it, they must own that it ought never to have been written, and having been published it certainly ought never to be read. It is, however, only just to the author to say that he has veiled the odious episode in mists of intangible obscurity, but nothing is gained by publishing such a terrible tale.

The last story, "Agnes Lahens," is a dreary, sad little tale of a convent-bred maiden who comes home to a weak father and a bad mother, and who, very naturally disgusted with the world as she sees it under her parents' roof, flies back again to the refuge of her convent and the companionship of the quiet, sedate nuns who had brought her up. Agnes does not strike one as a natural character, and her final scene with her father, which should be pathetically impressive, is in reality both stagey and unreal. There is no touch of genuine girl's human nature in her speech, which seems as pedantic and unnatural as an old-fashioned pious story book. Taken all round, "Celibates" will be a keen disappointment to most readers, and should never be placed on cherished bookshelves beside the noble history of "Esther Waters." A. M. G.

## Bookland.

## WHAT TO READ.

"The Crimea in 1854 and 1894." By General Sir Evelyn Wood, V.C., G.C.B., G.C.M.G. With plans and illustrations taken on the spot by Colonel the Hon. W. J. Colville, C.B. (London: Chapman and Hall.)

A Journal of the Plague Year. Written by a citizen who continued all the while in London, by Daniel Defoe, edited by George A. Aitken, with illustrations by J. B. Yeats. (London: J. M. Dent and Co., Aldine House, 69, Great Eastern Street, E.C.)

"Lotos-Time in Japan," by Henry I. Finck. (London: Laurence and Bullen.)

"The Love Affairs of an Old Maid," by Lilian Bell, author of "A Little Sister to the Wilderness."

"The Maister," by George H. Haswell. (London: Walter Scott. 10s 6d.)

"The Best Tour in Norway," by E. J. Goodman. With 34 full page illustrations and route map, second edition. (Sampson Low and Marston.) The book describes, with many practical details, a new circular tour through the hitherto little known but most beautiful scenery of South-West Norway.

"Artistic Travel," 1,000 miles towards the Sun, Normandy, Brittany, the Pyrenees, Spain and Algeria. With 130 illustrations, by Henry Blackburn, editor of "Academy Notes." (Sampson Low and Marston.)

\* "Celibates," by George Moore. 6s. (Walter Scott.) 1895.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)