

Mrs. Tweedie also strongly advocates the keeping by cottagers of chickens, and she suggests if this were done to any extent in our villages the difficulty and expense of transport to market could easily be overcome. "We import half a million of eggs a day," she says, "some of which come from Russia. Now, *can* eggs from Russia be as fresh as eggs laid outside our own back gardens?"

The paper on the 30th will be full of interest, and it is hoped there will be a large attendance to hear the patriotic and practical views of so representative a woman as is Mrs. Alec Tweedie.

BRITISH WOMEN'S TEMPERANCE ASSOCIATION.

The members of the National Executive Committee of the "British Women's Temperance Association" are delighted that Brighton has recently decided to re-affiliate with the National Society, as a result of Miss Agnes Slack's visit to that place.

It is equally encouraging to hear that since Miss Slack's visit to Ireland, the members of the Irish Women's Temperance Union in Athlone have decided to affiliate to the "World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union." They have had an increase of new members, and a helpful impetus has been given to the temperance work in the district.

A Book of the Week.

"A PROVINCIAL LADY."*

In these days of neurotic novels, when so many of the publications deal with uncomfortable, and distressing questions beyond the scope of average women to understand, I am often asked by harassed mothers to recommend them a book for their daughters' reading that shall be wholesome and enlivening, and truth to tell I generally find it somewhat difficult to give them a list of books that will amuse their girls without enervating their minds or arousing undesirable curiosity with regard to the marriage problems of life.

It is, therefore, a comfort to be able to recommend one novel unhesitatingly. "A Provincial Lady" is eminently readable, and entertaining, though perhaps it does not belong to the highest class of fictional writing, yet no one could possibly be the worse for its perusal, and possibly many people might feel the better for the simple straightforward manner in which right and wrong are treated in its pages. Authors get so muddled nowadays, and are constantly trying to upset and alter our old standards of conduct. The old Vice is now renamed the new Virtue, and the heroine of the modern novel is seldom (indeed one might say never) a good woman. Therefore the "Provincial Lady" is original in that respect, for she was a good woman by *instinct*, in spite of her crude and foolish ambition to shine in a world that was not her own by birth or position. She (Mrs. Wills) was the young and pretty wife of a provincial mayor, by whose aid a certain Mr. Tempest became M.P. for the provincial town of Ancester. Mr. Tempest was agreeably surprised to find the Mayor's wife "so charming, so innocent yet so undeniably clever, so full of fun yet not shallow." The episode of the Provincial Lady's acquaintance with the fascinating

M.P. is briefly dwelt upon. He flirted with her and *she* repented that he had done so, and the remembrance made her behave better than ever to her husband, but early in the story he dies, and leaves her a young widow with a comfortable income of £3,000 a year.

The interest of the book begins when Mrs. Wills determines to escape from provincial society, and to use her income and her looks to mix, and, if feasible, marry, among a smarter and more fashionable set of people than her first husband's relations and acquaintances. The history of her adventures in London, and her experiences with Duchesses, and Ladies of rank and title, are related with a keen sense of fun, and with much subtle knowledge of the world, the flesh and the &c. Life at such a pressure was by no means all "cakes and ale" to the unfortunate little lady. She had to endure many snubs, and pay away a great deal more money than she could comfortably afford to lose, before her education was complete, and then when she is at last launched as a member of so-called smart society everything for a time turns to ashes and remorse.

The Provincial Lady's sister-in-law, with her loud voice, vulgar manners, and kind heart, is a great feature in the book. We can so well understand why her company was so comfortable after the Duchesses and Countesses that had proved to be such unsatisfactory acquaintances and friends. There is a genuinely comic scene where her social god-mother, Lady Rachael, who undertakes to launch the Provincial Lady in London for the sum of £1,000, informs her, that she cannot consent to her inviting the wife of her husband's brother to the smart "At Home" that she has organised for her advertisement. The subsequent scene between the sisters-in-law is full of human nature. At first the elder Mrs. Wills behaves with admirable forbearance, but by degrees her grievances grow upon her and she becomes more and more indignant, till the situation of affairs becomes very strained indeed.

The heartless M.P. behaves badly to the widow of the Mayor who had secured his seat in Parliament, and towards the end of the book there is a capital scene when the elder Mrs. Wills, mistress of the situation at last, turns on the well-born, fashionable, so-called "gentleman," and in vigorous English informs him that *he* does not know a real lady when he sees one, and that he himself is a scoundrel and a cad, which indeed was perfectly true. Altogether the book is a merry tale and full of human amusement, and can be comfortably and safely recommended for any woman's reading; it will while away a dull hour, and shorten agreeably (as it did for me) a long railway journey. It is not, however, of the order of books to be bought. It is essentially a circulating library book and of ephemeral interest. Few people would, I think, care to read it more than once.

It is a matter for speculation if the books that make the literature of a country are entertaining reading the *first* time they are opened. Enduring books are more or less of an effort to read. The very depth of them is fatiguing, but then they can be re-read again and again, with growing delight and profit. As I have said before, "A Provincial Lady" is not of this highest order of novel, yet it is a pleasant little book, and one well worth reading once, which is far higher praise than can be bestowed upon the average fictional publication of the day.

A. M. G.

* "A Provincial Lady," by Mrs. F. Harcourt Williamson. (Hutchinson, 1896.)

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