

A Book of the Week.**"MARCH HARES."**

THAT delectable critic of English literature, William Hazlitt, in his well-known essay on "Wit and Humour," states that, in his opinion, "the essence of the laughable is the incongruous, the disconnecting one idea from another, or the jostling of one feeling against another." He also points out that, "You cannot force people to laugh; you cannot give a reason why they should laugh—they must laugh of themselves, or not at all." I remembered these two suggestive remarks of Hazlitt's when I had finished the last chapter of "March Hares," for the book is a genuinely funny one, and it would be well-nigh impossible to read it (even on a damp, dark day in a moated grange) without laughing. The book is constantly jostling one feeling against another, and thus arousing that latent sense of the ludicrous within us, which we all so much enjoy using, and which, in these days of problem and sex novels, we are so very seldom called upon to exercise.

"March Hares" is a good title for the story, which is a farce which succeeds in being funny—a great and somewhat rare merit in a farce. Have we not all experienced the depressing effects of seeing a play, reading a book, or hearing a story, which is intended to be amusing, but which fails to produce even the smallest smile upon our jaded faces? David Moss-crop and his heroine met on Westminster Bridge before breakfast one morning. There was no particular reason why they should meet and speak to each other, and subsequently become friends and lovers, but they did in the story, and their fate brought them together when they were unhappy, she because of an empty purse, and he because of an empty life, and we read of their mutual attraction for each other with a complacent conviction that they will end at the altar, and live happy ever afterwards, according to the good old-fashioned story-book method of relation. There is something peculiarly comic in the enjoyment that Moss-crop experiences over acquiring for his forlorn girl the necessities of life—boots and shoes, and food, and in his delight in providing her with luggage—a bag full of silver-topped bottles, scents, and soap! The conversation that takes place between this odd pair of friends is recorded with considerable literary art. They say jerky little sentences, and wander from their subject in the most refreshingly-natural manner, and, though the pages of the book are scattered with bright speeches, these delightful "March Hares" are not oppressively witty, and the reader never feels that they were created by their author to be epigrammatically pessimistic on all the disagreeable questions of the day. But Vestalia is not at all up to date. She does not like working for her own living at all, and is most naively pleased that her David should take care of her, and provide her with the necessities, as well as the luxuries, of life; and there is something peculiarly engaging in the way in which she asks him not to let her drink too much wine at their festival dinner, as she had no previous experience of the potency of that liquid.

The best-drawn character in the book is undoubtedly the Earl of Drumpipes, *alias* Mr. Linkhaw, who, with an income of four thousand a year and a moderate ex-

penditure, is always afraid of his incoming bills. His friendship with David Moss-crop, and the terms on which it is maintained, is very funny. Their conversation, and the frank rudeness with which they treat each other is insular, and in spite of their being Scotchmen, very "John Bullish."

Truly the Earl arrived home at a very inopportune hour, when David, having established Vestalia in his friend's flat apartment, under the same roof as his own, thought her tenancy was safe for some months to come, as "Drumpipes" had fled to Africa to escape from a law-suiting wife. How the wife departed opportunely from this world and left the Earl free to love, woo, and marry a charming American girl with a huge dowry of "Standard Oil" must be read to be appreciated. David's sentiments about the independence of women are worth quoting, because they are so truly representative of the sentiments upon this subject of, I very believe, every male being in these islands. His Vestalia asks him, by way of eliciting his opinion, if he does not think that women should be just as self-reliant and independent as men, and he replies:—

"I agree absolutely. I would have women insist upon the most unflinching independence, all the world over. I feel so keenly on this point that out of the entire sex I would make only one exception. Very few people would take such an advanced position as that, I imagine. Just fancy how far I go; There are hundreds of millions of women, and I would have them all independent but just one. . . . The thought of these women earning their own living fills me with joy. I am fascinated by it, I assure you. I feel like bursting into song at the barest suggestion of the idea. . . . (but) the very adumbration of an idea of your doing things for yourself convulses me with rage. The notion that my right to take charge of you is disputed seems monstrous and abominable to me. It is a denial of my mission on earth, and I am bound to combat it with all my powers."

The above extract is a very fair example of the bright, lively style in which the book is written throughout. It is not a profound work of philosophy, nor an epoch-making work of literature, but it is a right merry little story, with enough thought in it to make its laughter enjoyable. One of our best-known modern writers has said that no laughter is really enjoyable which has not a thought lurking behind its mirth. I can't remember or turn to the exact phrase, but that is the sense of his epigram. Behind the fun of "March Hares" there is plenty of brains, and we hope that "George Forth," whom literary gossip whispers is Mr. Harold Frederick, author of "Illumination," will soon give us another book as amusing and as enjoyable.

A. M. G.

Bookland.**WHAT TO READ.**

- "The Italians of To-day," by Rene Bazin. Translated by Josiah Crooklands. (London: Digby, Long).
- "Memorials (Part I.) Family and Personal, 1766—1865," by Roundell Palmer, Earl of Selborne. With Portraits and Illustrations. (Macmillan & Co.)
- "Old Melbourne Memories," by Rolf Boldrewood.
- "Federation and Empire: A Study in Politics," by Thomas Alfred Spalding, LL.B. (London: H. Henry and Co.)

* "March Hares," by George Forth. 6s. (John Lane, 1895.)

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