

A Book of the Week.

"HER WILD OATS."*

THIS book is more subtle than would appear upon the surface. It is a love story, not of an unusual kind, interspersed with bits of politics which are neither very clever nor very convincing. The situation may best be gleaned from Aunt Sophy's epitome of it. She, Aunt Sophy, is a lady of literary turn of mind, and she has had a rather romantic episode in her career, becoming the adopting mother of a little girl, the only child of her bosom friend, who was shipwrecked. This little Doris, with the literary aunt, have long kept house for Christopher Forrest, a handsome, dark, athletic young gentleman farmer, who resides in Berkshire, not far from the Thames.

"Now you see, my story is very simple so far," says Aunt Sophy to the embarrassed Chris. "The end is more difficult. It seems to me that as the girl got to love the young farmer very much, and as he always seemed to like her more than any other young woman he had anything to do with; I ought to relate in conclusion how he was so smitten with her charms that they became accepted lovers, and were married to the great joy of the young man's aunt. Don't you think so Chris?"

Naturally enough, Chris does not think so. Doris has always been a part of his daily life, and he is by no means romantic. So things stand when he makes the acquaintance of the mysterious beauty on the houseboat. Then, after his fashion, and within his limits, he falls in love. The fault of the narrator is that he makes poor Chris's limits so painfully obvious, that one quite fails to understand how it was that Diane should fall in love with him. The saving of her life might have been a strong enough motive with a totally inexperienced girl, but surely not to an actress who had known the world.

It does not seem possible to believe that Chris's ignorance of the manners of society is not overdone by the author. A man who is puzzled at his friend wishing to take a bath when he gets up in the morning, is surely out of date—and would a woman, with Aunt Sophy's breeding, have ordered roast beef, roast pork and mashed turnips, as a suitable lunch for a young girl, in the month of June? Things like this are too strained to be funny. But, as one reads on, the subtlety of the book, and of the author gradually appear. Chris is like Gyp's "Bijou,"—a monster of selfishness under the guise of youth, good looks, and good nature. His retribution is excellent: it is something like Pip's, in "Great Expectations," but Mr. Bickerdyke does not make the mistake that Dickens was persuaded into making, against his better judgment; he does not water down his catastrophe. You have to read to the last page to find it; and the author keeps the secret of his own contempt for poor Chris so well, that all through one is doubtful as to whether he is only very simple, or whether he is contemptible also. This is really artistic, for it is a genuine character-study. On this account one forgives many things. Mr. Bickerdyke should pay a little more attention to his English, for he has a quaint, pleasant liveliness of style which makes him good reading, or would do so, were one not frequently brought up short by such abominations as "Why should I trouble myself to act, differently to what I am

* "Her Wild Oats," By John Bickerdyke. (Thomas Burleigh.)

accustomed?" This odious "different to" occurs perpetually all through the book.

The author knows and loves his Thames,—the description of the Hartslock Woods, and of the catching of the trout in Cleve lock pool, will go to the heart of all Thames lovers. It is a pity to label the vicar "Mr. Smallmind," and the curate "Mr. Small-bore;" and, indeed, the book would be improved by the omission of all the part which concerns the Vicar and the Parish Council. It reads like a narration of something which had actually occurred, and about which the author felt spitefully. It may, of course, be actual, but it is in no sense typical. G. M. R.

WHAT TO READ.

"Porphyron, and Other Poems." By Laurence Binyon.

"Welsh Ballads, and Other Poems." By Ernest Rhys.

"The Reign of Terror": a Collection of Authentic Narratives of the Horrors committed by the Revolutionary Government of France under Marat and Robespierre, written by Eye-witnesses of the Scenes.

"Mr. Gregory's Letter Box, 1813-1830." Edited by Lady Gregory.

"Through Persia on a Side-Saddle." By Ella C. Sykes.

"Paul Kruger and His Times." By Reginald F. Statham.

"The Romance of Zion Chapel." By Richard Le Gallienne.

"Kronstadt." By Mr. Max Pemberton.

"The Vicar." By Joseph Hatton.

"Senorita Montemar." By Arthur P. Crouch.

"The Hon. Peter Stirling." By Paul L. Ford.

"A Bride of Japan." By Carlton Dawe.

"A Bachelor Girl in London." By G. E. Mitton.

Coming Events.

April 22nd.—Royal British Nurses' Association. The last lecture of the present session by Miss Georgina Scott, on "The Recreations of Working Women," at the Medical Society's Rooms, 11, Chandos Street, Cavendish Square. 8 p.m.

April 25th.—The Duke of Connaught presides at a banquet, at the Whitehall Rooms, in aid of St. Mark's Hospital, 8 p.m.

April 28th.—Hospital for Sick Children: Dinner at the Hôtel Métropole, the Duke of Fife presiding, 7 p.m.

April 28th.—Festival Dinner, City Orthopædic Hospital. Lord Mayor in the Chair.

April 30th.—The Speaker presides at a dinner in aid of the building fund of the Royal Westminster Ophthalmic Hospital at the Whitehall Rooms.

May 2nd.—The Bishop of London presides at a conference at Queen's College, London, on Women's Education, 3.30 p.m.

May 3rd.—Lord Lister presides at the Annual Dinner of King's College Hospital at the Whitehall Rooms.

May 11th.—Grand Choral and Orchestral Concert in aid of Westminster Hospital under the immediate patronage of H.R.H. the Princess of Wales and H.R.H. the Duke of York, K.G. St. James' Hall, 8 p.m.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)