

## A Book of the Week.

## "THE STORY OF A PLAY."\*

MR. HOWELL'S canvas is always somewhat minute, and his new tale, or rather study, is no exception to his usual methods. We have an actor, an author, and, last but not least, the author's wife. The situation is difficult: we feel tempted to suppose that, had the actor also had a wife, it might have become impossible. The author has an idea for a play: the actor thinks it might suit him. It is written accordingly, the author's only difficulty being that, in a spasm of disillusion caused by the coldness of Louise, whom he wishes to marry, he fancies himself unable to write love scenes. This distresses the actor comparatively little, because he wants it to be a one-part play, and in the character which he is to take, the interest is not of the love description.

However, by the time the play is actually written, Louise has relented, and become Mrs. Maxwell. It is the curious effect of the advent of this very important young person upon her husband, upon the actor (Mr. Launcelot Godolphin), and upon the play, that the whole story turns.

With a great number of fine, small touches, Mr. Howells paints in his twilight effects. Godolphin wants his part written up, regardless of the rest of the play: Mrs. Maxwell will have the highest possible aims—literary, moral and dramatic, and no compromise; and Maxwell, who has no means, and has married above him, is eternally held between these two stools by the prosaic question of £ s. d.

Godolphin, the actor, is a clever and amusing study; one might define him as a study in the unexpected. The way in which he keeps the poor young couple on tenter-hooks, his gyrations, his nice manners, his curious jealousies, his entire well-meaning—he is always either falling lamentably short, or else soaring far above all that is believed about him. The only thing that can be safely predicated is, that he will not do what is expected of him.

The story is spoiled, to me personally, by the character of Louise. Louise is great enough to see and recognise the talents and the moral worth of the young journalist who aims at higher literary flights. She has the pluck to marry him on very small means, and by so doing, in great measure to cut herself off from the set in which she has been brought up. It is not easy to believe that a girl with the grit to do all this could condescend to the immense utterly causeless and unreasonable jealousy here described; neither do I believe that a well-bred girl, not six months married, with nothing to do but to adjust her tiny ménage, would be found by her parents in a slatternly dressing-gown, in a drawing-room that had not been dusted, and without fresh flowers. It is not in character, somehow. One feels that Louise, as she is here depicted, was not a slattern.

Mr. Howells here seems to over-rate the unreasonableness of women. One would have supposed that a dramatic author, however recently wed, would have cut his throat, if subjected to the constant presence and interference of the beloved object in working hours, as here set forth.

\* By W. D. Howells. (Harper Bros.)

Be that as it may, the story makes amusing reading, especially to those who know something of the early days of literary effort; and the way out of the final difficulty is very well-found and ingenious.

G. M. R.

## Bookland.

THE Annual Report of the Women's Total Abstinence Union, published at the offices of the Union, 4, Ludgate Hill, E.C., and price 2d., is interesting reading. A picture of Miss M. E. Docwra, President of the Union, forms the frontispiece to the report. The pages dealing with the work of the Nurses' National Total Abstinence League, which was inaugurated last year, and which seems to be a vigorous branch of the parent stem, will have special interest for nurses. The President of this League is the Hon. Mrs. Eliot York, Hamble Cliff, Netley, Southampton, and the names of Miss Medill, Matron of St. Mary's Hospital, Paddington, and Miss Wainwright, Matron of the Clapham Maternity Hospital, are amongst those of the Committee.

AN excellent little book called "Baby Feeding: A Doctor's Advice to Mothers on the Rearing and Management of Infants," price 4d., has been published by Messrs. J. Wright and Co., of Bristol. It is written in simple language, and contains information with which every mother should acquaint herself. We note that the author seems to think that the delicacy and ill-health of children is due always to want of care in their up-bringing on the part of their mothers. The sins of fathers as well as mothers are visited upon their children.

MESSRS. CHAPMAN will issue during September a book entitled "Rambles in Lion Land," by Captain Pearce, Assistant Deputy Commissioner of British Central Africa. The book will narrate Captain Pearce's adventures and experiences in Somaliland, and also give much information with regard to the country and the people.

## Duty.

The longer on this earth we live  
And weigh the various qualities of men,  
Seeing how most are fugitives  
Or fitful gifts at best, of now and then,  
Wind wavered copse lights, daughters of the fen,  
The more we feel the high stern-featured beauty  
Of plain devotedness to duty,  
Steadfast and still, nor paid with mortal praise,  
But finding amplest recompense  
For life's ungarlanded expense  
In work done squarely and unwasted days.

J. R. LOWELL.

## WHAT TO READ.

- "A Study of Mary Wollstonecraft and the Rights of Woman." By Emma Rauschenbusch-Clough, Ph. D.
- "The Christian Statesman: William Ewart Gladstone." Sketch of his career. By Malcolm Stark.
- "The Kings Jackall." By Richard Harding Davis.
- "Wild Eelin." By William Black.
- "The Town Traveller." By George Gissing.

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