

A Book of the Week.

"CONCERNING ISABEL CARNABY."*

MISS THORNYCROFT FOWLER'S clever book is not absolutely new; but I liked it so much that I want to notice it, before going on to the more recently turned out dainties with which the publishers are this autumn regaling us.

It is a book more of promise than of performance, an early work of a clever woman who at present does not quite know how to arrange her materials, and is rather too fond of making the dialogue of her characters a medium for expressing her views. The plot is slight; in fact, there is no plot: it is merely the chronicle of a certain portion of two people's lives; there is not a single dénouement, not a single surprise (beyond the secret of the authorship of "Shams and Shadows") all through the book. The characters, all act as they might reasonably be supposed to do; they do not seem to be either fools, or preternaturally clever. The brainless and pretty Alice Martin, being in love with the brilliant Paul Seaton—who loves Isabel Carnaby—and beloved by Edgar Ford, we feel that, according to every canon of modern fiction, when Isabel Carnaby jilts Paul and engages herself to Lord Wrexham, Paul ought at once to settle the question by engaging himself to Alice Martin, and thereby secure the life-long misery of Lord Wrexham, Isabel Carnaby, Alice Martin, Edgar Ford, and himself. But nothing of the kind. Paul has the common sense to leave Alice Martin alone, Isabel repents, and the net result is that, instead of five people being miserable, the novelist only secures a perpetual sorrow for one of them, the jilted Lord Wrexham.

The charm of the book lies in its author's delightful style, especially when she is drawing such a character as she knows and has met—as the vulgar purse-proud Mrs. Martin, or the excellent Martha, servant in the minister's household. Martha is particularly successful, though the author has somewhat overdone the conversations between her and her young mistress, Joanna, who is another of the successes of the book.

When Miss Fowler has left off trying to be Mr. Frankfort Moore and John Oliver Hobbes rolled into one—that is to say, when she has left off her ceaseless striving after epigram, she will be really delightful reading. There is too much "talky-talky" in this novel. The opening scene at the dinner-party is delightful, and almost in the manner of the immortal "Dolly Dialogues;" but this high level cannot be maintained in a book which offers a connected story, and aims at getting beneath the surface. But perhaps, in saying so much, I am doing injustice to a book which is full of bright things.

"If ever I think a man is in danger of thinking me too 'clever,' says Isabel to Paul at their first meeting, 'I always ask him how to spell a word—any word will do, provided it is not too difficult for him. You can't think how it at once restores the equilibrium between the sexes.'

"Human nature is our disease, Christ is our cure," says the Methodist minister.

"I have met brave men in the flesh," says the artist, "and I am not impressed. They generally talk about nothing but slain beasts, and go to sleep after dinner."

"Joanna was a good woman because she loved God; Isabel was a good woman because she loved a good man."

* By Ellen T. Fowler. (Hodder and Stoughton.)

"I don't know how it is," mused Lady Farley: "but women who spell abstract nouns with capital letters, generally seem independent of such artificial aids to beauty as soap and water and hair brushes."

It is difficult to select bits to quote out of a book full of little nuggets. We should like another book by the author of "Isabel Carnaby."

G.M.R.

Bookland.

MR. STEPHEN CRANE'S "Pictures of War" will be an acceptable book to many who appreciate Mr. Crane's wonderful talent for word painting. He places before us war, as it actually is, with appalling accuracy, disdaining to conceal, or to soften down the grim details of brutal modern warfare. The more we realize what actually occurs on the battle-field, the better. Reviews and sham fights, from which at present many of us take our ideas of warfare, would then cease to have any glamour for us. "Pictures of War" is a reprint of those stories by which Mr. Crane has made his mark in the world of literature.

Peace.

"Were half the power that fills the world with terror,
Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts
Given to redeem the human mind from error,
There were no need of arsenals or forts.

The warrior's name, would be a name abhorred!
And every nation, that should lift again
Its hand against a brother, on its forehead
Would wear for evermore the curse of Cain!

Down the dark future, through long generations,
The echoing sounds grow fainter and then cease;
And like a bell, with solemn, sweet vibrations,
I hear once more the voice of Christ say 'Peace'!

Peace! and no longer from its brazen portals
The blast of war's great organ shakes the skies!
But beautiful as songs of the immortals
The holy melodies of love arise."

LONGFELLOW.

WHAT TO READ.

"Egypt in 1898." By G. W. Stevens.

"The Isles and Shrines of Greece." By Samuel J. Barrows.

"Factory Laws of European Countries." By Emma Brooke.

"The Terror:" A Sequel to the Reds of the Midi. By Felix Gras. Translated from the Provençal by Catherine Jauvier.

"Life in a Modern Monastery." By Joseph McCabe.
"A Crowned Queen." The Romance of a Minister of State. By Sydney C. Grier.

"The Rhymes and Rhapsodies of Oliver Grey."

"The God Horus," A Novel. By John Frederick Rowbotham, M.A.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)