## A Book of the Week.

### "THE OPEN QUESTION."*

This book has been set down by many high authorities as one of the most noteworthy of the year. And there is no doubt that it is a most remarkable piece of writing. The scene is laid in America but the subjects treated of, and the social aspects alluded to, are very unlike what one expects in American books. In some ways it resembles that fateful and pathetic story called "Lina's Picture." In both the happiness of two people is destroyed by a question of heredity. In "Lina's Picture," it is insanity that is the family taint. In the story before us, it is phthisis, and the hero and heroine are first cousins.

These are gruesome and difficult questions—open questions indeed, as the writer has named them. The solution at which the two Ganos arrive—Ethan and Val—is a tragic and a pessimistic one; and candidly, I do not think it a natural one. It is difficult to believe even in these days of atheism aud pessimism, and neurosis and diseased self-consciousness, that the primitive instinct of maternity would not cry aloud in the heart of any loving woman for her unborn child—child of the man whom she loved with all her heart. And underlying it all there is the dominant note of this present age, the same wild ungoverned natural impulses, the same fierce resentment against accepting consequences, the same dread of physical suffering, as if that were the worst evil of life, the same selfish desire for personal happiness, and rebellion against discipline, which one has read again and again in the novels of the hour. But let the author herself put it far more forcibly than I can, in the words of the wonderful old grandmother Gano, who is one of the most remarkable creations of modern fiction.

Every word spoken by this wonderful old woman, even when most mistaken, is worth hearing. Naturally, the old woman has her limitations; she is narrow, and, with her own children, horribly autocratic; but she is not too old to learn, and the mistakes she made with regard to her unhappy daughter certainly assisted her in her treatment of her granddaughter. Her life is one of aristocratic poverty, borne without a murmur; she had been the wife of a very wealthy Southerner before the war; her breeding never fails her, nor her self-control; if she is unsparing towards others, she is still more so as regards herself, and thus does she talk to the agnostic Ethan, her beloved grandson, upon her deathbed.

"Good Heaven! To hear you talk one would think you "had invented the law of heredity—you and your uncle "John."

"God fobid!"

"Well, God *has* forbid, and let that content you. He is "quite capable of looking after His Own world." . . . .

"I envy you your faith."

"No you don't. You think yourself superior to it, and "what's the result? You walk in darkness and in fear. "Not the fear of God—that's tonic—but the fear of pain. Oh, "I've watched this phase of modern life. It's been coming, "coming for years. The world to-day is crushed and "whining under a load of sentimentality. People presently "will be afraid to move, lest they do or receive some hurt."

"All people don't wear your armour."

"There is no armour but God," she said in a clear voice. . . . "Remember, you two, when you come in the "modern way to pick flaws in the faith, that if I wore stout "armour, as you say, it was not of this world's forging."

And one cannot but wonder that the two who stood beside that death-bed and heard those brave words, should not have had the courage to face the consequences of a mistake which they could not retrieve.

G. M. R.

* "The Open Question." By C. E. Raimond. Heinemann.

### WHAT TO READ.

"The Foundations of England: Twelve Centuries of British History (B.C. 55, A.D. 1154)." By Sir James H. Ramsay, of Banff, Bart, M.A.

"Angels' Wings: A Series of Essays on Art and its Relation to Life." By Edward Carpenter.

"The Standard of Life, and other Studies." By Mrs. Bernard Bosanquet.

"Tales of the Isle of Death" (Norfolk Island). By Price Warung.

"Nanno." By Rosa Mulholland.

"The Cruise of the Cachalot." By F. T. Bullen.

"A Deliverance." By Allen Monkhouse.

## "The Year that's Awa'."

Once in the winter time at midnight's pealing,
A little child stood by a shrouded bier.
With the last echo into silence stealing,
He murmured, in an eager watcher's ear,
"Heir of the centuries' unbroken line
I claim this dead king's heritage as mine,
And I am called 'New Year.'

Here is my hand! It holds the Past's redeeming,
A future gracious that unfolds to few.
Trust me—the crown and goal of human dreaming
Live in the passage of my hours for you.
O as the stars and mightier than seas,
One joy to ev'ry other holding keys
Since Eden's gift was new."

Another winter night, the old year dying,
Waits on the midnight stroke to bid him sleep.
"A child," he said, "on strength untried relying,
I vowed brave vows I had no faith to keep.
Recanting all, I claim your eyes' delight
To carry to that limbo out of sight
Where priceless things lie deep.

I ask no leaves to make the grave a bower,
And mask the mud-walls of my resting-place.
Cast in a tortured heart for "earth," and shower
Wild human tears upon my heedless face.
Fill up the gaps with hopes a life held sweet,
While ghosts of pledges that I failed to meet,
Beckon me into space.

For all new time, new things will take possession
Of this my sceptre when my hand is stilled,
But ne'er a voice in all the long procession
Shall greet you with those melodies I killed;
No other hands can take the fragments up
To piece together, and refill your cup
With the rare wine I spilled."

C. B. M.

previous page next page