

A Book of the Week.

THE STRANGE STORY OF HESTER WYNNE.*

GREATLY is the feminine autobiographist in favour as a heroine this season; and she seems to be much affected by the gentleman novelist, though I have my doubts as to the masculine gender of G. Colmore.

It is rather difficult for a reviewer to write a notice of this creepy book without entirely spoiling the reader's enjoyment of it; for the interest turns upon a certain mysterious possession of Hester Wynne, which she wears day and night, and the efforts of certain unscrupulous persons to possess themselves thereof.

There is really nothing incredible in the plot, though of course it is far fetched; and some of the scenes are so arranged as to give one a real genuine attack of "the creeps."

How easy it is to discredit the wild statements of a young and excitable girl by saying that she is hysterical! One feels throughout, the intense probability that nobody would believe poor Hester's assertion of the remarkable experiences she had been through, in face of the statements of the thoroughly proper and competent person who had brought her up, had been trusted by her mother as her sole guardian, and who asserted that she was excitable and prone to imagine things.

The hysterical girl is a type so lamentably familiar among us, her egotistical delusions, her exaggerations of her own importance, are so pitiable and so usual, that one feels sure, in Mrs. Brabrook's place, one would have regarded Hester with extreme suspicion when she made her appearance, without luggage, having fled from her guardian's roof in the night.

It seems an ingenious idea to utilize this situation for the purposes of fiction. A highly strung, imaginative girl, in the power of unscrupulous people! They might go almost any length with impunity; and they do. The final episode, though it is certainly startling, is undeniably original; and the evasion of the heredity problem by the almost unintentional Scotch marriage, was really quite a relief, after the neurotic terror of Miss Elizabeth Robins and authors of tales like "Lena's picture."

Beta is the only bit of character drawing in the book, and she is very good, indeed. The manner in which she is made to decoy Hester to Scotland is cleverly thought out, her own candid nature, her limited abilities, her devotion to Bob, and her devotion to Hester, make her a life-like person; and her last remark, as she bids adieu to Hester, is quite delightful.

"She kissed and clung to me, and paid me a characteristic compliment."

"I'm sure," she said, "that Bob will like you so much."

One feels that one knows Beta intimately.

As for poor Hester, she is so much occupied with midnight horrors, one hardly knows into what kind of a wife she would develop should her life settle down into something normal. But the fact that her nervous system held out at all, and that she remained sane after undergoing such awful experiences, speaks volumes in praise of her strength of mind.

It should be particularly added that "the boys" are quite delightful, and we wish the exigencies of the plot did not demand their complete banishment from the tale after the opening chapters. One feels that the creeping terror by night would have had little chance against them and their rifles.

G. M. R.

* By G. Colmore. Smith, Elder and Co.

Bookland.

THE *Woman's Agricultural Times*, a new monthly publication, edited by the Countess of Warwick, is the latest addition to the very limited number of journals edited by women, and promises well. Its cover is a pleasant shade of green, with black lettering, and on the left hand side is a figure of Ceres bearing ears of corn. Amongst the subjects dealt with in the present issue are "Practical Horticulture for Women," by the Editor; "National Poultry Organization," by Ernest F. G. Hatch, M.P.; "Useful Vocations for Women," by Professor J. P. Sheldon; "Bee-keeping for Women," by Miss L. A. Dunnington, and "The Keeping of Milch-Goats as an Occupation for Women," by Francis Bate. The subject matter, it will therefore be seen, is excellent, and as the type is good and pleasant to read, the journal should become popular.

Poem.

LIFE.

I asked of Life what pleasant gifts he brought;
He said he offered naught.

I asked him if the way were long and drear;
He said, "The goal's not near."

"A key," I cried, "I'll need when reached the goal."
He said, "The key's thy soul."

I questioned of the joys to cheer the way;
He said, "Work day by day."

I begged of him a friend—yea, only one;
He said, "Each walks alone."

I prayed him for some guidance from above;
He said, "Strive well to love."

I asked him whence he came and whither going;
He whispered, "Watch the seed growing."

I wrestled with him, seeking "how" and "why" ?
His answer was a sigh.

Fainting I cried, "And when the journey's o'er ?"
"Tis but a stage along the road," he said.
"Question no more."

From *Singings through the Dark*,

By DORA B. MONTEFIORE.

WHAT TO READ.

- "Japan in Transition." By Stafford Ransome, M.I.C.E.
"Admiral Philip. The Founding of New South Wales." By Louis Becke and Walter Jeffery.
"The Tenor and the Boy." By Sarah Grand. (Taken from "The Heavenly Twins.")
"A Girl of Grit." By Major Arthur Griffiths.
"Kit Kennedy: Country Boy." By S. R. Crockett.
"A Name to Conjure With." A Novel. By John Strange Winter.
"The Satellite's Stowaway." By H. Lander.
"The Orange Girl." By Sir Walter Besant.

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