

Aberdeen had undertaken to introduce a Bill to secure the eligibility of women to serve on Borough Councils into the House of Lords. This is only just, as the Bill passed by the Commons in the first instance, confirming this right of women to participate in municipal management, was squandered by the Lords on the majority of the Turf Club.

At a recent meeting, Miss Alice Busk, Guardian of the Poor, and late member of the Vestry of St. George-the-Martyr, Southwark, gave an address on the importance of the new Borough Councils appointing women on their sanitary staff. Miss Busk advocated the employment of women for certain duties only, viz.:—(1) the inspection of workshops, laundries, wholesale warehouses, &c., where women are employed; (2) the inspection, under the Tenement Bye-laws, of houses let in lodgings; and (3) the imparting of the knowledge of health questions and simple hygiene to the poor in their own homes. For this work she recommended that the most suitable to appoint were women not only fully qualified as sanitary inspectors, but who had had previous experience in hospital nursing.

The memory of Jane Austen, the novelist, who died at Winchester, in 1817, has at last been perpetuated. Her body lies in the north aisle of Winchester Cathedral beneath a plain slab. Now a stained-glass window, filled with allegorical figures, has been erected in the cathedral by the novelist's admirers.

A Book of the Week.

BABS THE IMPOSSIBLE.*

"Dr. Johnson is reputed once to have said to a proud mother, who told him the piece played by her daughter was very difficult, "Would to Heaven Madam that it were impossible!" Such would certainly be our aspiration with regard to the heroine of Madame Sarah Grand's new book, had the author not anticipated criticism by frankly labelling her heroine impossible. It is a very puzzling thing to guess why Madame Sarah Grand wrote the book at all. This is, of course, judging her by what she has already given to the world. Her books have hitherto been written to tell the world something that she thought it ought to know; and she has said many things that needed saying.

But one can see no such object in "Babs." Is the book intended to show that if a mother fails to initiate her daughter at, or before the age of fifteen, into a full comprehension of the ethics of the relations between the sexes, she cannot be surprised if the girl in question gets up in the middle of the night and goes alone to visit a young man who, for some reason never clearly explained, but only hinted at as something in the spiritualistic line, keeps solitary vigil in a lonely tower? That she will ask this young man to embrace her, and set the example by kissing him herself, until she sets his remarkably sluggish blood afire? We know this not to be true. We know that every girl with a line of good ancestry behind her, has deeply implanted in her, spite of rashness or ignorance, a certain reticence in her dealings with men, which prevents her from acting as Babs did.

* Sarah Grand. Hutchinson & Co.

Moreover, Babs, though her mother is kind and stupid, and too much addicted to the pleasures of the table, has an aunt who is sympathetic and also a governess, who, we are expressly told, is of the best modern kind, studying the separate disposition of each pupil to get the best from her. The Vicar, too, who is consulted about Babs, is, though not intellectual, described as a saint, so that Babs is by no means to be pitied for her over-developed sex cravings, and must be looked upon as a freak of nature. If this be so, why write her history? What profit is to be derived from its perusal?

There is a clever study of a hysterical woman in Bab's aunt, Lorraine Kingconstance. This woman, having some ability, has lived the life of a do-nothing young county lady, until, no marriage coming to release her from herself, she has become the prey of a diseased egotism. With this portrait we are thoroughly in sympathy, and feel delighted when a turn seems to be given to the tortured thoughts, and Miss Kingconstance begins to renew her youth, and to take interest in things outside herself. It is, therefore, proportionately disappointing, when we find that this change is merely the result of her having fallen in love with the man who is in love with Babs. This man—the hero of the lonely tower—with the general unaccountableness which characterises his actions, asks the aunt to marry him; and Babs rudely shatters the somewhat ghastly recrudescence of her aunt's youth, by explaining that, though the Marquis of Cadenhouse is engaged to the aunt, he wishes to marry the niece.

But though Babs is the nominal heroine of the book, its real interest circles around the mystery of Mr. Jellybond Tinney, who is a decidedly amusing and original person. His flirtations with the various ladies of the remote country neighbourhood are exceedingly good fun, and the account of his origin and the way his money was made, most original. He is a very successful character, because of the mixture in him of good and bad, of harmless vanity, and vanity which is by no means harmless, of worldliness and kindheartedness, of greatness and smallness. One never loses a kindly feeling for him, though we are genuinely delighted when Guy Spice knocks him down. His ambitions are for a while disturbed by his falling in love with Barbara Land, a most offensive young person, whom General St. Lambert selects as a companion for the wayward Babs.

"What is your religion may I ask?" Bab's mother bethinks herself to ask, after Barbara is duly installed as her daughter's guide, philosopher and friend.

"I can hardly give it a name," replies the gifted young woman. "To me any idea that one lays hold of religiously, with a view to making it an aid to a higher life, is religion."

It is difficult to imagine that a person with a mind in such a chaotic state of confusion, on the most important subject, could be a good teacher in any department of knowledge. One does not wonder that Barbara left Babs entirely uninfluenced.

On the whole the book, in spite of its cleverness which goes without saying, in spite of its spiritedness and the vigour with which it carries one along, must be pronounced wholly unsatisfactory, because the author gives you nobody with whom you can sympathise. The power of so presenting complex humanity that, in spite of follies and faults, the reader can love it, is the highest of all charms. One can sometimes

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)