

A Book of the Week.

THE CAT'S PAW.*

Mrs. Croker has written such an extremely good and interesting book, that it is a thousand pities that it is not just a little better.

The leading idea of the story is that of a friendless English girl, thrown by unfortunate circumstances upon her own resources in India. In the course of her adventures, we see some most interesting pictures of Indian life, from the Anglo point of view, for this indomitable young lady volunteers as nurse in a plague camp, becomes governess to a little Rajah and his sisters, and manages a boarding house for Eurasians in a suburb of Madras.

Pamela Ferrars is going out to India to be married. We are first introduced to her on the voyage out. The man to whom she is to be married, is one whom she has not seen since his boyhood, when he was by no means her lover; but his letters and his photograph are so charming that she yields to his fascinations, and consents to go out to him; the fact that her own relations, upon whom she is almost wholly dependent, are most anxious to get rid of her, being by no means an unimportant factor in her decision.

The precise nature of her disillusionment shall not here be stated, all this part is admirably done; suffice it to say that she breaks off her engagement, and goes to the lady who chaperoned her upon the voyage out, and who befriends her until she herself is removed by death. Then indeed the hapless Pamela is thrown upon her own resources; and a pretty time she has of it. The weak point in the story is its wild improbability. In order to introduce a most wonderful and striking picture of Madras Eurasians, their habits, ways and society, Pamela is made to resort to a most second rate Eurasian boarding house, kept by a Mrs. Rosario. One can imagine that under the admittedly awkward circumstances, she might have gone there for a few days; but that she would have stayed there is incredible. She has been robbed, upon her railway journey, of nearly all her money and of her letters of reference. Granted. But in six or seven weeks she could have obtained, from her friend Mr. Evans, the best of references, and a small loan to tide her over until she obtained a post. Moreover, the natural and obvious thing was for her to apply to the English clergyman, whose church, we are told, she regularly attended; and who, as being acquainted with pretty well every European resident, would have been the person most likely to have helped her to obtain a post. As far as we are told she takes no steps whatever to help herself, beyond the insertion of a single advertisement; and, as that does not bring her what she wants, she settles down to catering for the unspeakable Rosario crew.

The romance of the story is very pretty and charming, though again we have to strain probabilities, to imagine that Mr. Thorold would under the circumstances have permitted himself so completely to have lost sight of her. There are many little witty touches, a certain buoyancy and freshness of style, which is characteristic of all Mrs. Croker's work; as when Pamela, on being called a "bread and butter Miss," remarks that a bread and butter Miss should be

* By B. M. Croker. Chatto and Windus.

singularly well suited to a tea plantation; and suggests that her bridesmaids should be attired in the shade of green tea, with bouquets of tea roses. It seems a pity that a writer of so much experience should disfigure her pages with such painfully slipshod English as "different to," which occurs constantly, and so ghastly a construction as "*only for you*, I should not be here." Such obvious mistakes as these could be corrected so easily, that it seems a shame to leave them embedded in a well written book.

"The Cat's Paw" should interest all women, as a type of an energetic, clever woman, determined to be independent, sooner than succumb to the extremely strong pressure of circumstances, and marry a man who must have made her miserable. In spite of the complete way in which her common sense at times deserts her—notably at the crisis where she goes to the loathsome Ibrahim for an antidote to poison (it is difficult to imagine any woman behaving quite so foolishly)—Pamela Ferrars is a very interesting heroine.

G. M. R.

Verses.

PUSHING FORWARD.

There is always a way to rise, my boy,
Always a way to advance;
Yet the road that leads to Mount Success
Does not pass by the way of Chance,
But goes through the stations of Work and Strive,
Through the valley of Persevere,
And the man that succeeds while others fail,
Must be willing to pay most dear.
For there's always a way to fall, my boy,
Always a way to slide,
And the men you find at the foot of the hill
All sought for an easy ride.
So on and up, though the road be rough,
And the storms come thick and fast;
There is room at the top for the man who tries,
And victory comes at last.

What to Read.

- "Poetical Works of Robert Bridges."
- "Caroline the Illustrious." By Mr. W. H. Wilkins.
- "The Life of Napoleon I., including new materials from the British Official Records." By John Holland Rose, M.A.
- "Cecil Rhodes: A Study of a Career." By Howard Hensman. With portraits and other illustrations.
- "Fables for the Fair." By One of Them.
- "The Insane Root: a Romance of a Strange Country." By Mrs. Campbell Praed.
- "Princess Puck." Una L. Silberrad
- "The Countess of Maybury." A Successful Society Skit by Mr. W. B. Maxwell.

Coming Event.

Tuesday, February 18th.—Public meeting at Chelsea Town Hall, to receive the deputation of Women Textile Workers from Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Cheshire, who are presenting a Petition to Parliament asking for the Franchise for Women, Mr. Richard Bell, M.P., in the Chair, 8.30 p.m.

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