

A Book of the Week.

THE TRIUMPH OF COUNT OSTERMANN.*

This book comes very near to being quite an achievement. It fails by reason of the writer's being unable to convey to the reader the feelings actuating his hero when a woman is in question.

Politically, his Count Ostermann is all that can be desired. He is the one incorruptible man in the court of Peter the Great. From the historical point of view the story is incomparably interesting, as giving a real glimpse of Russian life in the days when Charles II. bore rule in England. We are apt to complain of the Russians for being so far behind the age, for their barbarous methods of government, their rudimentary civilisation, and so on. We do not in the least realise the immense distance they have traversed in the last three centuries.

Which of us has thoroughly grasped the fact that, when Peter the Great ascended the throne, the women of Russia were isolated in the "terem" in Oriental seclusion? Even he, autocrat as he was, though he insisted upon the presence of ladies at Court banquets, was obliged to allow them to sit at a separate table; and, judging by the account here given of Russian male manners and morals, the safeguard was abundantly necessary.

"The girl was gazing with the fascination of helpless terror at the noisy banqueters. . . . He knew well what lay before her. More than once he had feigned complete intoxication to escape taking an active part in the disgusting orgies which were the end of such feasts. The girl would be exposed to the insults of men degraded to the level of beasts, absolutely without restraint, and too drunk to realise the torture they inflicted. No one would dream of interfering."

Poor Peter! Have we ever given his due meed of credit to the man who fought against such odds as these to make his country civilised?

He felt, as every true reformer must, that no advance was possible if the women lagged behind.

"They must be made to take their part in society, like their Western sisters. . . . He ordered them to give receptions, issuing minute regulations as to the number of guests to be invited, and the kind of entertainment to be provided. The accounts which reached him afterwards made him weep with rage. The women could not talk freely with the men. They had hardly an idea in common. All their training for centuries had made such assemblies seem to them monstrously indecent."

Into such a society as this comes little Princess Marfa, who has been educated by a Scotch governess, Christian Gordon, whom she has also seen murdered by the moujiks, on a charge of witchcraft. Marfa has been imbued by Christian with some considerable idea of the dignity of womanhood; and when the Czar marries her to his favourite, Count Ostermann, who is not noble by birth, she is enraged, and declines to have anything to do with her husband. This is wholly satisfactory to Ostermann, who has no desire whatever for matrimony, and has married her only by the request of his master. The book deals with the gradual falling in love of Marfa with her husband, which would be satisfactory enough could we be

assured that her feeling was reciprocated, but this the writer wholly fails to show or convey. We leave Ostermann disgraced, and on his way to Siberia, and his wife visits him in the cell, to assure him of her love and to offer to accompany him. We cannot help feeling that the prospect before her is a singularly dreary one. Love can sweeten all lots; but Siberia, with a disappointed, disgraced man, of tepid feelings, and, as far as one knows, with no love to bestow, seems a colourless future for a beautiful, rich, and highly-born young woman.

Apart from this fish-like propensity, Count Ostermann is a very fine fellow, and, as before said, the historical aspect of the story is most absorbingly interesting. G. M. R.

Lift Up Thine Eyes.

By CLINTON SCOLLARD.

Comrade, that seek'st the clew
Of whence and whither to.
Rather, in trust, let be
The shrouded mystery!
Brood not, but toward the skies
Lift up thine eyes!

If the sworn friendship fail,
And fleeing foes assail,
If Love, half deified,
Turn scornfully aside,
If ogre Doubt arise,
Lift up thine eyes!

Grip faith, to thee (not fate!)
In the good ultimate!
With this, from sun to sun
Until thy race be run,
And the last daylight dies,
Lift up thine eyes!

—From the *Idler*.

What to Read.

"The Lonely Way, and other Poems." By W. A. Adams, M.A.

"The Land of the Boxers; or, China Under the Allies." By Captain Gordon Casserly, Indian Army.

"The Tale of a Tour in Macedonia." By G. F. Abbott.

"He for God Only." By "Iota" (Mrs. Mannington Caffyn).

"Foggy Fancies and Other Stories." By Beatrice Whitby.

Coming Events.

April 25th.—Annual meeting of Hospital Saturday Fund at Mansion House, Lord Mayor presiding.

April 30th.—The Lord Mayor presides at the festival dinner of the National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic.

May 4th.—The Hon. W. F. D. Smith, M.P., presides at a festival in aid of the East London Hospital for Children, Shadwell.

May 8th.—Matrons' Council, General Council Meeting, 20, Hanover Square, London, W., 11 a.m., Miss Isla Stewart presiding.

* By Graham Hope. Smith, Elder and Co.

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