

A Book of the Week.

THE WOMAN WITH THE FAN.*

Mr. Hichens's last work, "Felix," showed him to be thoroughly master of all the difficulties and subtleties of his technique. But even "Felix" was, perhaps, not quite such a masterpiece as his present book, "The Woman with the Fan."

It is needless to point out that Mr. Hichens has formed his style entirely upon French models. The book under consideration is so completely French that one is sometimes startled at the thought that one is reading it in another language. The author has acquired, above all things, the art of presenting his characters to his reader only at the moments when he intends that they shall be seen. We have no explanations, no interludes, no superfluities; the work of art is all.

There is only one drawback to the brilliancies of this method—namely, that one has a feeling of drama which will not disappear. One can, in a sense, better love a worse book, because one feels that one is admitted to intimacies, through the very failure of the author to arrange his material so as to exclude. But this is mere hypercriticism after all. The fact of the striking brilliancy, the real greatness of "The Woman with the Fan" remains.

It is a theme which has never really, in all its possibilities, been offered to the world before—the theme of a beautiful society woman, admired by all, adored by many, married by a man who loves her with a savage passion and pride of possession; this woman losing all her beauty by one horrible, mangling accident; this woman becoming, from a thing of beauty, a thing of horror and fear; a thing upon which one cannot look without repulsion.

Such is the fate of Viola, Lady Holme. She has always known it beforehand, with a kind of tragic insight—known the merciless fact that for the people in her world "beauty resides in the epidermis." But though she has always known it, she has not realised it. She has not ever faced the desolation, the abandonment which will be hers. The great, brutal, admiring husband staggers from the room, unable to bear the sight. Her power over him was physical, without doubt. But there was Robin Pierce—Robin, who was always telling her that within her there dwelt another woman, a white angel, who spoke in her voice when she sang; Robin, who had said he would welcome any change that should set that white angel free. Even Robin cannot stand the test of that disfigured face, those mutilated features.

Then there is left only Rupert Carey, who had been unable to bear his misery when she married Lord Holme, and had taken to drink. In her dark moment, when, forsaken by all men, she rows out upon the lake to drown herself, Rupert Carey comes to her and says, "Live, to save me."

This man alone has really grasped the spiritual love of which Robin Pierce could talk, but which he had not the depth really to feel.

Such is the story, which runs its course, and reaches its end with such subtlety and skill.

It includes the drawing of the portrait of Miss Pimpernel Schley. If there were nothing else in all the book, this portrait would immortalise it. It is the portrait of the modern bad woman; the demure, still type, with the serious face, and

* By Robert Hichens. (Mothuen.)

the air of never observing anyone or anything. It is the type of the sly woman, who knows all there is to know, and sees all there is to see, and gets all she wants to get, with the fair floss-silk hair of an infant, and an elderly and respectable Marmar for a chaperone.

Nothing could more express the whole tendency and tone and texture of the world which Mr. Hichens knows so well, and describes so ruthlessly, than the figure of this woman. Pimpernel Schley is the epitome of a certain type of decadence. Viola Holme is the woman who, finding herself in this *milieu*, must try to belong to it. She is leading a life in which she is deliberately crushing all spiritual aspirations. The other woman has neither spirit nor aspirations. There is no deliberate attempt to force this contrast upon the reader. But it stands out. G. M. R.

What to Read.

"The Meaning of a Modern Hospital." By W. Bruce Clarke, F.R.C.S., Surgeon to St. Bartholomew's Hospital.

[Mr. Clarke gave, some little time ago, a mid-session address before the Abernethian Society of St. Bartholomew's Hospital. He here publishes it slightly enlarged, with a diagram.]

Coming Events.

May 2nd.—Leap Year Dinner in aid of the Samaritan Hospital for Women, Prince's Galleries.

May 5th.—Concert in aid of Queen's Charlotte's Hospital, Queen's Hall.

May 12th.—The Lord Mayor presides at the Festival Dinner of the City of London Hospital for Diseases of the Chest, Hotel Cecil.

May 13th.—Quarterly Council Meeting of the Matrons' Council, 431, Oxford Street, London, W., 11 a.m.

May 13th.—Annual Meeting of the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses, 20, Hanover Square, W., 3 p.m. Miss Louisa Stevenson, President, in the chair.

AGENDA.

1. Minutes of the last meeting.
 2. Opening Remarks by the President.
 3. To receive the Annual Report and Audited Accounts.
 4. To elect the Executive Committee for the ensuing year.
 5. To consider the following additions to the Constitution:—
 - "That ladies and gentlemen not connected with nursing be eligible for election as Associates of the Society."
 - "That the annual subscription for Associates shall be 5s."
 6. To consider the following Resolution:—
 - "That this meeting cordially approves of the Bill for the Registration of Nurses introduced this Session into the House of Commons by Dr. Farquharson, M.P., and considers that it is desirable, in the public interest, that a Select Committee should be appointed to inquire into the whole Nursing Question."
 7. Other business.
- Tea, by the kind invitation of the President.

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