

Book of the Week.

OUR LADY OF THE BEECHES.*

A book written partly or wholly in the form of letters does not invariably commend itself as interesting reading. There is a danger that the construction may be laboured, the story hampered by much that is unnecessary to its development, the characters literary puppets whose brilliant mental gymnastics entirely deprive us of the sense of their humanity. Not one of these faults is to be found in "Our Lady of the Beeches," a book that is, in every sense of the word, charming from beginning to end.

It opens with a prologue of some two dozen letters, covering the space of rather more than a year. The sequence of idea is perfect, there is no single stroke that does not tell eventually upon the growth of interest into friendship, friendship into mutual understanding, and its inevitable consequences.

When Winifred, American, woman of the world, and wife of Count Zerdahelyi, writes anonymously to the Author of "The Pessimist's Breviary," care of his publishers, it is entirely without coquetry or the desire of making any impression upon him. She has no means of knowing what manner of man he is, since, for literary purposes, he has chosen to remain incognito before the public. But his book has aroused her interest so keenly that she would fain know whether it "expresses his real convictions or is written, as it were, by a fictitious character." The letter reaches him amongst fifty or more others containing pages of heart history, and one or two photographs all destined to remain unanswered, and unacknowledged. But the woman who tells him nothing of herself, who has the audacity to challenge the very fact that he is in earnest, piques him into reply. She writes from a Beech Forest, but gives him the address of an old servant in Paris who will forward letters. Thus she becomes to him "Our Lady of the Beeches," and he is to her The Pessimist of the laboratory, whence he writes. An oddly assorted couple, but the very diversity of their tastes naturally leads them into the labyrinths of discussion at once mind-opening and heart searching. Feeling perfectly secure in their incognito, and determined never to attempt to break it or to meet, they gradually throw aside formal reserve and enter upon a frank friendship most enjoyable to both. But presently into the letters there creeps a sense of something deeper, a restiveness on the part of the Pessimist and acknowledgment on the part of Our Lady of the Beeches that she has been tempted to divulge her identity. The Pessimist has an illness, and the utter loneliness of his life presents itself to him; he writes more unguardedly, and though her answer is kindly it contains a warning also. It is their misfortune that an accident throws them together, and at that point the letters cease, the narrative continues in the ordinary way of a romance, with

* By Baroness von Hutton. (Heinemann.)

such skill that we are sensible of neither hitch nor break. And here begins the vital interest of the story: it is impossible to foretell what will be the outcome of the meeting in the woods—the unconventional introduction—the clashing of actual personalities. "Our Lady of the Beeches" is a beautiful little summer idyll in a perfect setting of woodland life. It is of the nature of those "sweetest songs" that "tell of saddest thought." The writing is most graceful, an excellent example of musical prose. There is nothing jarring or forced throughout in either humour—of which there is much—or pathos. It is a pleasure to meet a hero and heroine in latter day fiction, in whom not only moral balance but common sense are made of so much account.

E.L.H.

Coming Events.

May 18th to June 8th.—Travel Exhibition at the Royal Horticultural Hall, Vincent Square, Westminster. Exhibit by Burroughs, Wellcome, and Co. 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.

May 23rd.—Lady Alice Ashley lays the Foundation Stone of the New Nurses' Home at the Royal Hants County Hospital, Winchester, 3 p.m.

May 24th.—Annual Meeting of the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses, Medical Society's Rooms, 11, Chandos Street, Cavendish Square, W., 4 p.m. Miss M. Mollett presiding.

AGENDA.

1. Minutes.
2. Address by the Chairman.
3. To receive the Annual Report and Audited Accounts.
4. To receive the resignation of the President, Miss Louisa Stevenson, LL.D., and to elect a President and Senior Vice-President.
5. To elect the Executive Committee for the ensuing year.
6. To consider Resolutions.
7. Other business.

May 29th.—Annual General Meeting, Asylum Workers' Association, Medical Society's Rooms, 11, Chandos Street, Cavendish Square, 4 p.m.

May 29th.—Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, opens the "Rainbow Bazaar" at Prince's Skating Rink, in aid of the British Lying-In Hospital, Endell Street, and will receive purses from children.

A Word for the Week.

"In striving for that Utopia that men have dreamed of in all the ages, when sickness and sorrow shall be no more known, may we, too, be of those who count in strengthened purpose, with clearer vision, and adequate conception of the work before us, for "a time like this demands strong minds, great hearts, true faith, and ready hands."—ANNIE DAMER, President of the Associated Alumnae of the United States.

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